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'Like unto moths fretting a garment' PSALM

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MOTHS.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FEW weeks later they were at Svir.

Svir was one of the grandest summer palaces of the many palaces of the Princes Zouroff. It had been built by a French architect in the time of the great Catherine's love of French art, and its appanages were less an estate than a province or principality that stretched far away to the horizon on every side save one, where the Baltic spread its ice-plains in the winter, and its blue waters to the brief summer sunshine. It was a very grand place; it had

acres of palm-houses and glass-houses; it had vast stables full of horses; it had a theatre, with a stage as large as the Folies-Marigny's; it had vast forests in which the bear and the boar and the wolf were hunted with the splendour and the barbarity of the royal hunts that Snyders painted; it was a Muscovite Versailles, with hundreds of halls and chambers, and a staircase, up which fifty men might have walked abreast; it had many treasures, too, of the arts, and precious marbles, Greek and Roman; yet there was no place on earth which Vere hated as she hated Svir.

To her it was the symbol of despotism, of brutal power, of soulless magnificence; and the cruelties of the sport that filled all the days, and the oppression of the peasantry by the police-agents which she was impotent to redress, weighed on her with continual pain. She had been taught in her girlhood to think; she knew too much to accept the surface gloss of things as their truth; she could not be content with a life which was a perpetual pageantry, without any other aim than that of killing time.

So much did the life at Svir displease her, and so indifferent was she to her own position in it, that she never observed that she was less mistress of it than was the Duchesse de Sonnaz, who was there with the Duc Paul, a placid sweet-tempered man, who was devoted to entomology and other harmless sciences. It was not Vere, but Madame Jeanne who directed the amusements of each day and night. It was Madame Jeanne who scolded the manager of the operetta troup, who selected the pieces to be performed in the theatre, who organised the hunting parties and the cotillons, and the sailing, and the riding. It was Madame Jeanne who, with her pistols in her belt, and her gold-tipped ivory hunting-horn, and her green tunic and trowsers, and her general *franc-tireur* aspect, went out with Sergius Zouroff to see the bear's death-struggle, and give the last stroke in the wolf's throat.

Vere—to whom the moonlit *curée* in the great court was a horrible sight, and who, though she had never blenched when the wolves had bayed after the sledge, would have turned sick

and blind at sight of the dying beasts with the hunters' knives in their necks—was only glad that there was anyone who should take the task off her hands of amusing the large house-party and the morose humours of her husband. The words of Corrèze had failed to awaken any suspicion in her mind.

That the presence of Madame de Sonnaz at Svir was as great an insult to her as that of Noisette in the Kermesse pavilion never entered her thoughts. She only as yet knew very imperfectly her world.

'It is well she is beautiful, for she is only a bit of still life,' said Prince Zouroff very contemptuously to some one who complimented him upon his wife's loveliness.

When she received their Imperial guests at the foot of her staircase, with a great bouquet of lilies of the valley and orchids in her hand, she was a perfect picture against the ebony and malachite of the balustrade—that he granted; but she might as well have been made of marble for aught of interest or animation that she showed.

It angered him bitterly that the luxury and extravagance with which she was surrounded did not impress her more. It was so very difficult to hurt a woman who cared for so little; her indifference seemed to remove her thousands of leagues away from him.

'You see it is of no use to be angry with her,' he said to his confidant, Madame Jeanne. 'You do not move her. She remains tranquil. She does not oppose you, but neither does she alter. She is like the snow, that is so white and still and soft; but the snow is stronger than you; it will not stop for you.'

Madame Jeanne laughed a little.

'My poor Sergius! you *would* marry!'

Zouroff was silent; his eyebrows were drawn together in moody meditation.

Why had he married? he wondered. Because a child's coldness, and a child's rudeness had made her loveliness greater for a moment in his sight than any other. Because, also, for Vere, base as his passion had been, it had been more nearly redeemed by tenderness than anything he had ever known.

'The snow is very still, it is true,' said Madame Jeanne musingly; 'but it can rise in a very wild *tourmente* sometimes. You must have seen that a thousand times.'

'And you mean——?' said Zouroff, turning his eyes on her.

'I mean that I think our sweet Vera is just the person to have a *coup de tête*, and to forget everything in it.'

'She will never forget what is due to me,' said Zouroff angrily and roughly.

Madame de Sonnaz laughed.

'Do you fancy she cares about that? what she does think of is what is due to herself. I always told you she is the type of woman that one never sees now—the woman who is chaste out of self-respect. It is admirable, it is exquisite; but all the same it is invulnerable; because it is only a finer sort of egotism.'

'She will never forget her duty,' said her husband peremptorily, as though closing the discussion.

'Certainly not,' assented his friend; 'not as long as it appears duty to her. But her

ideas of duty may change—who can say? And, *mon cher*, you do not very often remember yours to her!'

Zouroff blazed into a sullen passion, at which Madame de Sonnaz laughed, as was her wont, and turned her back on him, and lighted a cigar.

'After all,' she said, 'what silly words we use! Duty!—honour!—obligation! "*Tout cela est si purement géographique*," as was said at Marly long ago. I read the other day of Albania, in which it is duty to kill forty men for one, and of another country in which it is duty for a widow to marry all her brothers-in-law. Let us hope our Vera's views of geography will never change.'

They were standing together in one of the long alleys of the forest, which was resounding with the baying of hounds and the shouting of beaters. For all reply Sergius Zouroff put his rifle to his shoulder; a bear was being driven down the drive.

'*A moi*!' cried Madame Jeanne. The great brown mass came thundering through the

brushwood, and came into their sight; she raised her gun, and sent a bullet through its forehead, and snatched Zouroff's breech-loader from him, and fired again. The bear dropped; there was a quick convulsive movement of all its paws, then it was still for ever.

'I wish I could have married you!' cried Zouroff enthusiastically. 'There is not another woman in Europe who could have done that at such a distance as we are!'

'*Mon vieux*, we should have loathed one another,' said Madame Jeanne, in no way touched by the compliment. 'In a conjugal capacity I much prefer my good Paul.'

Zouroff laughed—restored to good humour—and drew his hunting-knife to give the customary stroke for surety to her victim. The day was beautiful in the deep green gloom and balmy solitude of the forest, which was chiefly of pines.

'Sport is very stupid,' said Madame Jeanne, blowing her ivory horn to call the keepers. 'Vera is employing her time much better, I am

sure; she is reading metaphysics, or looking at her orchids, or studying Nihilism.'

'Let me forget for a moment that Vera exists,' said her husband, with his steel in the bear's throat.

Vere was studying Nihilism, or what has led to it, which comes to the same thing.

The only town near Svir was one of no great importance, a few miles inland, whose citizens were chiefly timber-traders, or owners of trading ships, that went to and from the Baltic. It had some churches, some schools, some war of sects, and it had of late been in evil odour with the government for suspected socialist doctrines. It had been warned, punished, purified, but of late was supposed to have sinned again; and the hand of the Third Section had fallen heavily upon it.

Vere this day rode over to it, to visit one of its hospitals; her mother, and other ladies, drove there to purchase sables and marten skins.

Lady Dolly had been so near—at Carlsbad, a mere trifle of a few hundred miles—that she had been unable to resist the temptation of

running over for a peep at Svir, which she was dying to see, so she averred. She was as pretty as ever. She had changed the colour of her curls, but that prevents monotony of expression, and, if well done, is always admired. She had to be a little more careful always to have her back to the light, and there was sometimes about her eyes lines which nothing would quite paint away; and her maid found her more pettish and peevish. That was all; twenty years hence, if Lady Dolly live, there will be hardly more difference than that.

Her Sicilian had been also on the banks of the Teple—only for his health, for he was not strong—but he had been too assiduous in carrying her shawls, in ordering her dinners, in walking beside her mule in the firwoods, and people began to talk; and Lady Dolly did not choose to imperil all that the flowers for the Children's Hospitals, and the early services at Knightsbridge, had done for her, so she had summarily left the young man in the fir woods, and come to Svir.

'I always like to witness my dear child's

happiness, you know, with my own eyes when I can; and in London and Paris both she and I are so terribly busy,' she said to her friends at Carlsbad.

Herself, she always recoiled from meeting the grave eyes of Vere, and the smile of her son-in-law was occasionally grim and disagreeable, and made her shiver; but yet she thought it well to go to their houses, and she was really anxious to see the glories of Svir.

When she arrived there, she was enraptured. She adored novelty, and new things are hard to find for a person who has seen as much as she had. The Russian life was, in a measure, different to what she had known elsewhere, the local colour enchanted her, and the obeisances and humility of the people she declared were quite scriptural.

The grandeur, the vastness, the absolute dominion, the half-barbaric magnificence that prevailed in this, the grandest summer palace of the Zouroffs, delighted her; they appealed forcibly to her imagination, which had its vulgar side. They appeased her conscience,

too; for, after all, she thought, what could Vere wish for more? Short of royalty, no alliance could have given her more wealth, more authority, and more rank.

These Baltic estates were a kingdom in themselves, and the prodigal, careless, endless luxury, that was the note of life there, was mingled with a despotism and a cynicism in all domestic relations that fascinated Lady Dolly.

'I should have been perfectly happy if I had married a great Russian,' she often said to herself; and she thought that her daughter was both thankless to her fate and to her. Lady Dolly really began to bring herself to think so.

'Very few women,' she mused, 'would ever have effaced themselves as I did; very few would have put away every personal feeling and objection as I did. Of course she doesn't know—but I don't believe any woman living would have done as I did, because people are so selfish.'

She had persuaded herself in all this time

that she had been generous, self-sacrificing, even courageous, in marrying her daughter as she did; and when now and then a qualm passed over her, as she thought that the world might give all these great qualities very different and darker names, Lady Dolly took a little sherry or a little chloral, according to the time of day, and very soon was herself again.

To be able to do no wrong at all in one's own sight, is one of the secrets of personal comfort in this life. Lady Dolly never admitted, even to herself, that she did any. If anything looked a little wrong, it was only because she was the victim to unkindly circumstance over which she had no control.

People had always been so jealous of her, and so nasty to her about money.

'It is all very well to talk about the saints,' she would say to herself, 'but they never had any real trials. If the apostles had had bills due that they couldn't meet, or St. Helen and St. Ursula had had their curls come off just as they were being taken in to dinner, they might have talked. As it was, I am sure they enjoyed

all their martyrdom, just as people scream about being libelled in "Truth" or "Figaro," and delight in having their names in them.'

Lady Dolly always thought herself an ill-used woman. If things had been in the least just, she would have been born with thirty thousand a year, and six inches more stature.

Meanwhile she was even prettier than ever. She had undergone a slight transformation; her curls were of a richer ruddier hue, her eyelashes were darker and thicker, her mouth was like a little pomegranate bud. It was all Piver; but it was the very perfection of Piver. She had considered that the hues and style of the fashions of the coming year, which were always disclosed to her very early in secret conclave in the Rue de la Paix, required this slight deepening and heightening of her complexion.

'I do wish you would induce Vera to rouge a little, just a little. Dress this winter really will want it; the colours will all be dead ones,' she had said this day at Svir to her son-in-law, who shrugged his shoulders.

'I have told her she would look better; but she is obstinate, you know.'

'Oh-h-h!' assented Lady Dolly. 'Obstinate is no word for it; she is *mulish*; of course, I understand that she is very proud of her skin, but it would look all the better if it were warmed up a little; it is *too* white, *too* fair, if one can say such a thing, don't you know? And, besides, even though she may look well now without it, a woman who never rouges has a frightful middle-age before her. Didn't Talleyrand say so?'

'You are thinking of whist; but the meaning is the same. Both are resources for autumn that it is better to take to in summer,' said Madame Nelaguine, with her little cynical smile.

'Vera is very fantastic,' said the Duchesse Jeanne. 'Besides, she is so handsome she is not afraid of growing older; she thinks she will defy Time.'

'I believe you can if you are well enamelled,' said Lady Dolly seriously.

'Vera will be like the woman under the Merovingian kings,' said Madame Nelaguine.

'The woman who went every dawn of her life out into the forests at daybreak to hear the birds sing, and so remained, by angels' blessing, perpetually young.'

'I suppose there was no society in France in that time,' said Lady Dolly; 'or else the woman was out of it. In society everybody has always painted. I think they found all sorts of rouge-pots at Pompeii, which is so touching, and brings all those poor dear creatures so near to us; and it just shows that human nature was always exactly the same.'

'The Etruscan focolare, I dare say, were trays of cosmetics,' suggested Madame Nelaguine sympathetically.

'Yes?' said Lady Dolly, whose history was vague. 'It is so interesting, I think, to feel that everybody was always just exactly alike, and that when they complain of us it is such nonsense, and mere spite. Vera, why will you not rouge a little, a very little?'

'I think it a disgusting practice,' said her daughter, who had entered the room at that moment, dressed for riding.

'Well, I think so too,' said Madame Nelaguine with a little laugh. 'I think so too, though I do it; but my rouge is very honest; I am exactly like the wooden dolls, with a red dab on each cheek, that they sell for the babies at fairs. Vera would be a sublime wax doll, no doubt, if she rouged; but, as it is, she is a marble statue. Surely that is the finer work of art.'

'The age of statues is past,' murmured the Duchess Jeanne. 'We are in the puppet and monkey epoch.'

'It is all cant to be against painting,' said Lady Dolly. 'Who was it said that the spider is every bit as artificial as the weaver?'

'Joseph le Maistre,' said Madame Nelaguine, 'but he means——'

'He means, to be sure,' said Lady Dolly with asperity, 'that unless one goes without any clothes at all, like savages, one must be artificial; and one may just as well be becomingly so as frightfully so; only I know frights are always *thought* natural, as snubbing, snapping creatures are thought so sweetly

sincere. But it doesn't follow one bit; the frights have most likely only gone to the wrong people to get done up.'

'And the disagreeable snappers and snubbers and snarlers?'

'Got out of bed the wrong end upwards,' said Lady Dolly, 'or have forgotten to take their dinner-pills.'

'I begin to think you are a philosopher, Lady Dolly.'

'I hope I am nothing so disagreeable,' said Lady Dolly. 'But at least I have eyes, and my eyes tell me what a wretched, dull, pawky-looking creature a woman that doesn't do her self up looks at a ball.'

'Even at twenty years old?'

'Age has nothing to do with it,' said Lady Dolly very angrily. 'That is a man's idea. People don't paint because they're old; they paint to vary themselves, to brighten themselves, to *clear* themselves. A natural skin may do very well in Arcadia, but it won't do where there are candles and gas. Besides, a natural skin's always the same; but when you paint,

you make it just what goes best with the gown you have got on for the day; and as women grow older what are they to do? It is all very well to say "bear it," but who helps you to bear it? Not society, which shelves you; not men, who won't look at you; not women, who count your curls if they are false, and your grey hairs if they are real. It is all very well to talk poetry, but who likes *déchéance*. It is all very well to rail about artificiality and *postiche*, but who forced us to be artificial, and who made *postiche* a necessity? Society; society; society. Would it stand a woman who had lost all her teeth and who had a bald head? Of course not. Then whose is the fault if the woman goes to the dentist and the hair-dresser? She is quite right to go. But it is absurd to say that society does not make her go. All this cry about artificiality is cant, all cant. Who are admired in a ball-room? The handsome women who are not young but are dressed to perfection, painted to perfection, coiffréd to perfection, and are perfect bits of colour. If they come out without their *postiche* who would look

at them? Mothers of boys and girls you say? Yes, of course they are; but that is their misfortune; it is no reason why they shouldn't look as well as they can look, and, besides, nowadays it is only married women that are looked at, and children in short frocks, which is disgusting.'

Lady Dolly paused for breath, having talked herself into some confusion of ideas, and went away to dress and drive.

She forgot the wrongs of fate as she drove to Molv with the old ambassador Lord Bangor, who was staying there, and a charming young Russian of the Guard, whose golden head and fair beauty made her Sicilian seem to her in memory yellow and black as an olive; he had really had nothing good but his eyes, she reflected as she drove.

When she reached Molv she admired everything; the bearded priests, the churches, the bells, the pink and yellow houses, the Byzantine shrines. She was in a mood to praise. What was not interesting was so droll, and what was not droll was so interesting. If her companion of the Imperial Guard had not

had a head like a Circassian chief, and a form like Hercules, she might perhaps have found out that Molv was ugly and very flat, dirty and very unsavoury, and so constituted that it became a pool of mud in winter, and in summer a shoal of sand. But she did not see these things, and she was charmed. She was still more charmed when she had bought her sealskins and sables at a price higher than she would have given in Regent Street; and, coming out opposite the gilded and painted frontage of the chief church, which was that of St. Vladimir, she saw a sad sight.

Nothing less than a score of young men and a few women being taken by a strong force of Cossacks to the fortress; the townspeople looking on, gathered in groups, quite silent, grieved but dumb, like poor beaten dogs.

'Dear me! how very interesting!' said Lady Dolly, and she put up her eye-glasses. 'How very interesting! some of them quite nice-looking, too. What have they done?'

The Russian of the Guard explained to her that they were suspected of revolutionary con-

spiracies, had harboured suspected persons, or were suspected themselves: Nihilists, in a word.

'How very interesting!' said Lady Dolly again. 'Now, one would never see such a sight as that in England, Lord Bangor?'

'No,' said Lord Bangor seriously; 'I don't think we should. There are defects in our constitution——'

'Poor things!' said Lady Dolly, a pretty figure in *feuillemorte* and violet, with a jewelled ebony cane as high as her shoulder, surveying through her glass the chained, dusty, heart-sick prisoners. 'But why couldn't they keep quiet? So stupid of them! I never understand those revolutionaries; they upset everything, and bore everybody, and think themselves martyrs! It will be such a pity if you do get those horrid principles here. Russia is too charming as it is; everybody so obedient and nice as they are at present, everybody kneeling and bowing, and doing what they're told—not like *us* with our horrid servants, who take themselves off the very day of a big party, or say they won't stay if they haven't pine-apples. I think

the whole social system of Russia perfect—quite perfect; only it must have been nicer still before the Tsar was too kind, and let loose all those serfs, who, I am quite sure, haven't an idea what to do with themselves, and will be sure to shoot him for it some day.'

Lady Dolly paused in these discursive political utterances, and looked again at the little band of fettered youths and maidens, dusty, pale, jaded, who were being hustled along by the Cossacks through the silent scattered groups of the people. A local official had been wounded by a shot from a revolver, and they were all implicated, or the police wished to suppose them to be implicated, in the offence. They were being carried away beyond the Ourals; their parents, and brothers and sisters, and lovers knew very well that never more would their young feet tread the stones of their native town. A silence like that of the grave—which would perhaps be the silence of the grave—would soon engulf and close over them. Henceforth they would be mere memories to those who loved them: no more.

'They look very harmless,' said Lady Dolly, disappointed that conspirators did not look a little as they do on the stage. 'Really, you know, if it wasn't for these handcuffs, one might take them for a set of excursionists; really now, mightn't we? Just that sort of jaded, dusty, uncomfortable look——'

'Consequent on "three shillings to Margate and back." Yes; they have a Bank holiday look,' said Lord Bangor. 'But it will be a long Bank holiday for them; they are on their first stage to Siberia.'

'How interesting!' said Lady Dolly.

At that moment an old white-haired woman, with a piercing cry broke through the ranks, and fell on the neck of a young man, clinging to him for all that the police could do, till the lances of the Cossacks parted the mother and son.

'It is a sad state of things for any country,' said Lord Bangor; and the young captain of the Guard laughed.

'Well, why couldn't they keep quiet?' said Lady Dolly. 'Dear me! with all this crowd,

however shall we find the carriage? Where is Vere, I wonder? But she said we need not wait for her. Don't you think we had better go home? I shouldn't like to meet wolves.'

'Wolves are not hungry in summer,' said Lord Bangor. 'It is only the prison's maw that is never full.'

'Well, what are they to do if people won't keep quiet?' said Lady Dolly. 'I'm sure those young men and women do not look like geniuses that would be able to set the world on fire. I suppose they are work-people, most of them. They will do very well, I dare say, in Tomsk. Count Rostrow, here, tells me the exiles are beautifully treated, and quite happy; and all that is said about the quicksilver mines is all exaggeration; newspaper nonsense.'

'No doubt,' said Lord Bangor. 'To object to exile is a mere bad form of Chauvinism.'

'Why couldn't they keep quiet if they don't like to go there?' she said again; and got into the carriage, and drove away out into the road over the plain, between the great green sea of billowy grasses, and the golden ocean of ripened

grain; and, in time, bowled through the gilded gates of Svir; and ate her dinner with a good appetite; and laughed till she cried at the drolleries of a new operetta of Méta's, which the French actors gave in the little opera-house.

'Life is so full of contrasts in Russia; it is quite delightful; one can't be dull,' she said to Lord Bangor, who sat beside her.

'Life is full of contrasts everywhere, my dear lady,' said he. 'Only, as a rule, we never look on the other side of the wall. It bores us even to remember that there is another side.'

Vere that night was paler and stiller even than it was her wont to be. She went about amongst her guests with that grace and courtesy which never changed, but she was absent in mind; and once or twice, as the laughter of the audience rippled in echo to the gay melodies of Meta, a shiver as of cold went over her.

'She must have heard something about Corrèze that has embarrassed her,' thought Madame de Sonnaz, but she was wrong.

Vere had only seen the same sight that her mother had seen, in the little town of Molv.

That night, when the house party had broken up to go to their apartments, and she had gained the comparative peace of her own chamber, Vere, when her maids had passed a loose white gown over her and unloosened her hair, sent them away, and went into the little oratory that adjoined her dressing-room. She kneeled down, and leaned her arms on the rail of the little altar, and her head on her arms; but she could not pray. Life seemed to her too terrible; and who cared? who cared?

Riches had done their best to embellish the little sanctuary: the walls were inlaid with malachite and marbles; the crucifix was a wonderful work in ivory and silver; the *prie-dieu* was embroidered in silks and precious stones; there was a triptych of Luke von Cranach, and Oriental candelabra in gold. It was a retreat that had been sacred to the dead Princess Mania, her husband's mother, a pious and melancholy woman.

Vere cared little for any of these things;

but the place was really to her a sanctuary, as no one ever disturbed her there; even Zouroff never had presumed to enter it; and the painted casements, when they were opened, showed her the green plain, and, beyond the plain, the beautiful waters of the Baltic. Here she could be tranquil now and then, and try to give her thoughts to her old friends the Latin writers; or read the verse of George Herbert or the prose of Thomas a Kempis, and pray for force to bear the life she led.

But to-night she could not pray.

She was one of those who are less strong for the woes of others than for her own.

She leaned her face upon her arms, and only wondered — wondered — wondered — why men were so cruel, and God so deaf.

It was nearly two in the morning; through the painted panes the stars were shining; beyond the plain there was the silver of the dawn.

Suddenly a heavy step trod on the marbles of the pavement. For the first time since their marriage, her husband entered the place of

prayer. She turned, and half rose in astonishment, and her heart grew sick; she was not safe from him even here. He marked the instinct of aversion, and hated her for it; the time was gone by when it allured and enchained him.

'Excuse me for my entrance here,' he said with that courtesy to which the presence of his wife always compelled him, despite himself. 'I am exceedingly annoyed, compromised, disgusted. You were in Molv to-day?'

'Yes; I rode there. I went to see your mother's hospital.'

She had quite risen, and stood, with one hand on the altar rail, looking at him.

'I hear that you saw those prisoners; that you spoke to them; that you made a scene, a scandal; that you gave one of the women your handkerchief; that you promised them all kinds of impossible follies. Be so good as to tell me what happened.'

'Who spies upon me?' said Vere, with the colour rising to her face.

'Spies! No one. If you choose to exhibit

yourself in a public street, a hundred people may well see you. What did happen? Answer me.'

'This happened. I met the prisoners. I do not believe any of them are guilty of the attempt to assassinate General Marcoloff. They are all very young, several were girls; one of the girls broke from the guards, and threw herself before me, sobbing and begging my help. Her arm was cut and bleeding, I suppose in fastening the chains; I took my handkerchief and bound it up; I promised her to support her mother, who is old and infirm. I spoke to them all and bade them try and bear their fate calmly. I wept with them, that I confess; but I was not alone —there were not many dry eyes in Molv. I believe all these young people to be quite innocent. I believe if the Emperor saw the things that are done in his name, he would not sanction them. That is all I have to tell you. It has haunted me all the evening. It is horrible that such tyrannies should be; and that we should dine, and laugh, and spend

thousands of roubles in a night, and live as if no living creatures were being tortured near us. I cannot forget it; and I will do what I can to serve them.'

She had never spoken at such a length to her husband in all the three years of her married life; but she felt strongly, and it seemed to her that here reticence would have been cowardice. She spoke quite tranquilly, but her voice had a depth in it that told how keenly she had been moved.

Zouroff heard her with a scowl upon his brows; then he laughed contemptuously and angrily.

'*You* believe!' he echoed. 'What should you know, and why should you care? Will you learn to leave those things alone? A Princess Zouroff dismounting in the dust to bind up the wounds of a Nihilist convict! What a touching spectacle! But we will have no more of these scenes if you please; they are very unbecoming, and, more, they are very compromising. The Emperor knows me well, indeed, but enemies might carry such a tale to

him; and he might see fit to suspect, to order me not to leave Russia, to imprison me on my estates. It is as likely as not that your theatrical vagaries may get bruited about at Court. I neither know nor care whether these creatures shot Marcoloff or abetted shooting at him; what I do care for is the dignity of my name.'

Vere, standing beside the great ivory crucifix, with the draperies of plush and ermine falling about her, and her fair hair unbound and falling over her shoulders, turned her face more fully upon him. There was a faint smile upon her lips.

'The dignity of *your* name!' she said merely; and the accent said the rest.

The calm contempt pierced his vanity and his self-love, and made him wince and smart. The first sign she had given that the unworthiness of his life was known to her had been when she had ordered him to remove the pavilion of Noisette. He had always set her aside as a beautiful, blonde, ignorant, religious creature, and the shock was

great to him to find in her a judge who censured and scorned him.

'The dignity of my name,' he repeated sullenly and with greater insistance. 'We were great nobles with the Dolgarouki, when the Romanoffs were nothing. I do not choose my name to be dragged in the dust because you are headstrong enough, or childish enough, to fancy some incendiaries and assassins are martyrs. Have politics, if you like, in Paris in your drawing-room, but leave them alone here. They are dangerous here, and worse than dangerous. They are low. I deny you nothing else. You have money at your pleasure, amusement, jewels, anything you like; but I forbid you political vulgarities. I was disgusted when I heard of the spectacle of this morning; I was ashamed——'

'Is it not rather a matter for shame that we eat and drink, and laugh and talk, with all this frightful agony around us?' said Vere, with a vibration of rare passion in her voice. 'The people may be wrong; they may be guilty; but their class have so much to avenge,

and your class so much to expiate, that their offence cannot equal yours. You think I cannot understand these things? You are mistaken. There are suffering and injustice enough on your own lands of Svir alone to justify a revolution. I know it; I see it; I suffer under it; suffer because I am powerless to remedy it, and I am supposed to be acquiescent in it. If you allowed me to interest myself in your country, I would try not to feel every hour in it an exile; and the emptiness and nothingness of my life would cease to oppress and to torment me——'

'Silence!' said Zouroff, with petulance. 'You may come here for prayer, but I do not come here for sermons. The emptiness of your life! What do you mean? You are young, and you are beautiful; and you have in me a husband who asks nothing of you except to look well and to spend money. Cannot you be happy? Think of your new cases from Worth's, and let political agitators keep the monopoly of their incendiary rubbish. You have been the beauty of Paris and Petersburg

for three years. That should satisfy any woman.'

'It merely insults me,' she answered him. 'Society comes and stares. So it stares at the actress Noisette, so it stares at that nameless woman whom you call Casse-une-Croûte. Is that a thing to be proud of? You may be so; I am not. Men make me compliments, or try to make them, that I esteem no better than insults. Your own friends are foremost. They talk of my portraits, of my busts, of my jewels, of my dresses. Another year it will be someone else that they will talk about, and they will cease to look at me. They find me cold, they find me stupid. I am glad that they do; if they did otherwise, I should have lived to despise myself.'

'*Nom de Dieu!*' muttered Zouroff; and he stared at her, wondering if she had said the names of Noisette and Casse-une-Croûte by hazard, or if she knew? He began to think she knew. He had always thought her blind as a statue, ignorant as a nun; but, as she stood before him, for the first time letting loose the

disdain and the weariness that consumed her heart into words, he began slowly to perceive that, though he had wedded a child, she was a child no longer; he began to perceive that, after three years in the great world, his wife had grown to womanhood with all that knowledge which the great world alone can give.

As she had said nothing to him, after the Kermesse, of the absence of Noisette, he had fancied her anger a mere *boutade*, due perhaps to pride, which he knew was very strong in her. Now he saw that his wife's silence had arisen not from ignorance but from submission to what she conceived to be her duty, or perhaps, more likely still, from scorn; a scorn too profound and too cold to stoop to reproach or to reproof.

'Why cannot you be like any other woman?' he muttered. 'Why cannot you content yourself with your *chiffons*, your conquests, your beauty? If you were an ugly woman one could understand your taking refuge in religion and politics; but, at your age, with your face and figure! Good heavens! it is too ridiculous!'

The eyes of Vere grew very stern.

'That is your advice to me? to content myself with my *chiffons* and my conquests?'

'Certainly; any other woman would. I know you are to be trusted; you will never let men go too far.'

'If I dragged your name in the dust throughout Europe you would deserve it,' thought his wife; and a bitter retort rose to her lips. But she had been reared in other ways than mere obedience to every impulse of act or speech. She still believed, despite the world about her, that the word she had given in her marriage vow required her forbearance and her subjection to Sergius Zouroff—she was still of the 'old fashion.'

She controlled her anger and her disdain, and turned her face full on him with something pleading and wistful in the proud eyes that had still the darkness of just scorn.

'You prefer the society of Noisette and Casse-une-Croûte; why do you need mine too? Since they amuse you, and can content you, cannot you let me be free of all this gilded bondage, which is but a shade better than their

gilded infamy? You bid me occupy myself with *chiffons* and conquests. I care for neither. Will you give me what I could care for? This feverish frivolous life of the great world has no charm for me. It suits me in nothing; neither in health nor taste, neither in mind nor body. I abhor it. I was reared in other ways, and with other thoughts. It is horrible to me to waste the year from one end to the other on mere display, mere dissipation—to call it amusement is absurd, for it amuses no one. It is a monotony, in its way, as tiresome as any other.'

'It is the life we all lead,' he interrupted her with some impatience. 'There is intrigue enough in it to salt it, God knows!'

'Not for me,' said Vere coldly, with an accent that made him feel ashamed. 'You do not understand me—I suppose you never will; but, to speak practically, will you let me pass my time on one of your estates; if not here, in Poland, where the people suffer more, and where I might do good? I have more strength of purpose than you fancy; I would educate

the peasant children, and try and make your name beloved and honoured on your lands—not cursed, as it is now. Let me live that sort of life, for half the year at least; let me feel that all the time God gives me is not utterly wasted. I helped many in Paris; I could do more, so much more, here. I would make your people love me; and then, perhaps, peace at least would come to me. I am most unhappy now. You must have known it always, but I think you never cared.'

The simplicity of the words, spoken as a child would have spoken them, had an intense pathos in them, uttered as they were by a woman scarcely twenty, who was supposed to have the world at her feet. For one moment they touched the cold heart of Zouroff, as once before at Félicité the uplifted eyes of Vere had touched him at their betrothal, and almost spurred him to renunciation of her and refusal of her sacrifice. And she looked so young, with her hair falling back over her shoulders, and behind her the white crucifix and the stars of

the morning skies—and her child had died here at Svir.

For the moment his face softened, and he was moved to a vague remorse and a vague pity; for a moment Noisette and Casse-une-Croûte, and even Jeanne de Sonnaz, looked to him vulgar and common beside his wife; for a moment *les verres épais du cabaret brûtal* seemed tainted by the many lips that used them, and this pure golden cup seemed worthy of a god. But the moment passed, and the long habits and humours of a loose and selfish life resumed their sway within him; and he only saw a lovely woman whom he had bought as he bought the others, only with a higher price.

He took the loose gold of her hair in his hands with a sudden caress and drew her into his arms.

'*Pardieu!*' he said with a short laugh. 'A very calm proposition for a separation! That is what you drive at, no doubt; a separation in which you should have all the honours as Princess Zouroff still! No, my lovely Vera, I am not disposed to gratify you,—so. You

belong to me, and you must continue to belong to me, nilly-willy. You are too handsome to lose, and you should be grateful for your beauty; it made you mistress of Svir. Pshaw! how you shudder! You forget you must pay now and then for your diamonds.'

There are many martyrdoms as there are many prostitutions that law legalises and the churches approve.

She never again prayed in her oratory. The ivory Christ had failed to protect her.

All the month long there was the pressure of social obligations upon her, the hot-house atmosphere of a Court about her, for imperial guests followed on those who had left a few days earlier, and there could be no hour of freedom for the mistress of Svir.

Her mother was radiantly content; Count Rostrow was charming; and a Grand Duke found her still a pretty woman; play was high most nights; and the Sicilian was forgotten. All that troubled her was that her daughter never looked at her if she could help it, never spoke to her except on the commonplace

courtesies and trifles of the hour. Not that she cared, only she sometimes feared other people might notice it.

These days seemed to Vere the very longest in all her life. Her apathy had changed into bitterness, her indifference was growing into despair. She thought, with unutterable scorn, 'If the world would only allow it, he would have Casse-une-Croûte here!'

She was nothing more in her husband's eyes than Casse-une-Croûte was.

All the pride of her temper, and all the purity of her nature, rose against him. As she wore his jewels, as she sat at his table, as she received his guests, as she answered to his name, all her soul was in revolt against him; such revolt as to the women of her world seemed the natural instinct of a woman towards her husband, a thing to be indulged in without scruple or stint, but which to her, in whom were all the old faiths and purities of a forgotten creed, seemed a sin.

A sin!—did the world know of such a thing? Hardly. Now and then, for sake of

its traditions, the world took some hapless boy, or some still yet unhappier woman, and pilloried one of them, and drove them out under a shower of stones, selecting them by caprice, persecuting them without justice, slaying them because they were friendless. But this was all.

For the most part, sin was an obsolete thing; archaic and unheard of; public prints chronicled the sayings and the doings of Noisette and Casse-une-Croûte; society chirped and babbled merrily of all the filth that satirists scarce dare do more than hint at lest they fall under the law. There was no longer on her eyes the blindness of an innocent unconscious youth. She saw corruption all around her; a corruption so general, so insidious, so lightly judged, so popular, that it was nearly universal; and amidst it the few isolated souls, that it could not taint and claim and absorb, were lost as in a mist, and could not behold each other.

A dull hopelessness weighed upon her. Her husband had counselled her to lose herself in *chiffons* and in conquests!

She knew very well he would not care if she obeyed him; nay, that he would perhaps like her the better. As he had often bade her put red upon her cheeks, so he would have awakened to a quicker esteem of her if he had seen her leaving ballrooms in the light of morning, with the ribbons of the cotillons on her breast, smiling on her lovers above the feathers of her fan, provoking with effrontery the gaze of passion, answering its avowals with smiling reproof that meant forgiveness, and passing gaily through the masque of society with kohl around her eyes, and a jest upon her mouth, and hidden in her bosom or her bouquet some royal lover's note. He would have esteemed her more highly so. Perhaps, then, she might even have stood higher in his eyes than Casse-une-Croûte.

She thought this, as she sat in the evening at his table, with her imperial guests beside her, and, before her eyes, the glow of the gold plate with the Zouroff crown upon it. She was as white as alabaster; her eyes had a sombre indignation in them; she wore her Order of

St. Catherine and her necklace of the moth and the star.

'If one did not keep to honour, for honour's sake,' she thought, 'what would he not make me!—I should be viler than any one of them.'

For, as she saw her husband's face above that broad gleam of gold, the longing for one instant came over her, with deadly temptation, to take such vengeance as a wife can always take, and teach him what fruit his own teachings brought, and make him the byword and mock of Europe.

The moment passed.

'He cannot make me vile,' she thought. 'No one can—save myself.'

As her breast heaved quicker with the memory, the ever trembling moth of the medallion rose and touched the star.

'An allegory or a talisman?' said one of the imperial guests who sat on her right hand, looking at the jewel.

'Both, sir,' answered Vere.

Later in the evening, when, after seeing a

Proverbe exquisitely acted, the princes were for the present hour absorbed in the card-room, Madame Nelaguine lingered for a moment by her sister-in-law. Vere had gone for an instant on to the terrace, which overlooked the sea, as did the terrace of Félicité.

'Are you well to-day, my Vera?'

'As well as usual.'

'I think Ischl did you little good.'

'Ischl? What should Ischl do for me? The Traun is no Lethe.'

'Will you never be content, never be resigned?'

'I think not.'

Madame Nelaguine sighed.

She had never been a good woman, nor a true one, in her world; but in her affection for her brother's wife she was sincere.

'Tell me,' said Vere abruptly, 'tell me—you are his sister, I may say so to you—tell me it does not make a woman's duty less, that her husband forgets his?'

'No, dear—at least—no—I suppose not. No, of course not,' said Madame Nelaguine.

She had been a very faithless wife herself, but of that Vere knew nothing.

'It does not change one's own obligation to him,' said Vere wearily, with a feverish flush coming over her face. 'No; that I feel. What one promised, one must abide by; that is quite certain. Whatever he does, one must not make that any excuse to leave him?'

She turned her clear and noble eyes full upon his sister's, and the eyes of Madame Nelaguine shunned the gaze and fell.

'My dear,' she said evasively, 'no, no; no wife must leave her husband; most certainly not. She must bear everything without avenging any insult; because the world is always ready to condemn the woman—it hardly ever will condemn the man. And a wife, however innocent, however deeply to be pitied, is always in a false position when she quits her husband's house. She is *déclassée* at once. However much other women feel for her, they will seldom receive her. Her place in the world is gone, and when she is young, above all, to

break up her married life is social ruin. Pray, pray do not ever think of that. Sergius has grave faults, terrible faults, to you; but do not attempt to redress them yourself. You would only lose caste, lose sympathy, lose rank at once. Pray, pray, do not think of that.'

Vere withdrew her hand from her sister-in-law's; a shadow of disappointment came on her face, and then altered to a sad disdain.

'I was not thinking of what I should lose,' she said, recovering her tranquillity. 'That would not weigh with me for a moment. I was thinking of what is right; of what a wife should be before God.'

'You are sublime, my dear,' said the Russian princess, a little irritably because her own consciousness of her own past smote her and smarted. 'You are sublime. But you are many octaves higher than our concert pitch. No one now ever thinks in the sort of way that you do. You would have been a wife for Milton. My brother is, alas! quite incapable of appreciating all that devotion.'

'His power of appreciation is not the

measure of my conduct,' said Vere, with a contempt that would have been bitter had it not been so weary.

'That is happy for him,' said his sister drily. 'But, in sad and sober truth, my Vera, your ideas are too high for the world we live in; you are a saint raising an oriflamme above a holy strife; and we are only a rabble of common maskers—who laugh.'

'You can laugh.'

'I do not laugh, heaven knows,' said her sister-in-law, with a glisten of water in her shrewd, bright eyes, that could not bear the candid gaze of Vere. 'I do not laugh. I understand you. If I never could have been like you, I revere you—yes. But it is of no use, my dear, no use, alas! to bring these true and high emotions into common life. They are too exalted; they are fit for higher air. Roughly and coarsely if you will, but truly, I will tell you there is nothing of nobility, nothing of duty, in marriage, as our world sees it; it is simply—a convenience, a somewhat clumsy contrivance to tide over a social difficulty. Do

not think of it as anything else; if you do, one day disgust will seize you; your high and holy faiths will snap and break; and then——'

'And then?'

'Then you will be of all women most unhappy; for I think you could not endure your life if you despised yourself.'

'I have endured it,' said Vere in a low voice. 'You think I have not despised myself every day, every night?'

'Not as I mean. The wrong has been done to you. You have done none. All the difference lies there—ah, such a difference, my dear! The difference between the glacier and the mud-torrent!'

Vere was silent. Then, with a shiver, she drew her wraps about her as the cold wind came over the sea.

'Shall we go in the house? It is chilly here,' she said to her sister-in-law.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE two shooting-months passed at Svir; brilliantly to all the guests, tediously and bitterly to the mistress of the place. Lady Dolly had early vanished to see the fair of Nijni Novgorod with a pleasant party, and Count Rostrow for their guide; and had vague thoughts of going down the river and seeing the spurs of the Caucasus, and meeting her husband in St. Petersburg, where, so enraptured was she with the country, she almost thought she would persuade him to live. Duc Paul and Duchesse Jeanne had gone on a round of visits to friends in Croatia, Courland, and Styria. Troops of guests in succession had

arrived, stayed at, and departed from, the great Zouroff palace on the Baltic; and, when the first snows were falling, Sergius Zouroff travelled back to his villa on the Riviera with no more preparation or hesitation than he would have needed to drive from the Barrière de l'Etoile to the Rue Helder.

'What waste it all is!' thought his wife, as she looked at the grand front of Svir, its magnificent forests and its exquisite gardens. For ten months out of the year Svir, like Félicité, was like a hundred thousand castles and palaces in Europe; it served only for the maintenance and pleasure of a disorderly and idle troop of hirelings, unjust stewards, and fattening thieves of all sorts.

'What would you do with it if you had your way?' asked Madame Nelaguine.

She answered, 'I would live in it; or I would turn it into a Russian St. Cyr.'

'Always sublime, my love!' said Madame Nelaguine, with a touch of asperity and ridicule.

The towers of Svir faded from Vere's sight in the blue mists of evening; a few days and

nights followed and then the crocketted pinnacles and metal roofs of the Riviera villa greeted her sight against the blue sky and the blue water of the gulf of Saint-Hospice.

'This is accounted the perfection of life,' she thought. 'To have half a dozen admirably appointed hotels all your own, and among them all—no home!'

The married life of Vere had now begun to pass into that stage common enough in our day, when the husband and the wife are utter strangers one to another; their only exchange of words being when the presence of others compels it, and their only appearance together being when society necessitates it.

A sort of fear had fallen on Sergius Zouroff of her, and she was thankful to be left in peace. Thousands of men and women live thus in the world; never touch each other's hand, never seek each other's glance, never willingly spend five seconds alone, yet make no scandal and have no rupture, and go out into society together, and carry on the mocking semblance of union till death parts them.

Again and again Vere on her knees in her solitude tried to examine the past and see what blame might rest on her for her failure to influence her husband and withhold him from vice, but she could see nothing that she might have done. Even had she been a woman who had loved him she could have done nothing. His feeling for her had been but a mere animal impulse; his habits were engrained in every fibre of his temper. If she had shown him any tenderness, he would have repulsed it with some cynical word; fidelity to his ear was a mere phrase, meaning nothing; honour in his creed was comprised in one thing only, never to shrink before a man. Even if she had been a woman who had cared for him she would have had no power to alter his ways of life. Innocent women seldom have any influence. Jeanne de Sonnaz could always influence Zouroff; Vere never could have done so, let her have essayed what she would. For be the fault where it may in our social system, the wife never has the power or the dominion that has the mistress.

A proud woman, moreover, will not stoop as low as it is necessary to do to seize the reins of tyranny over a fickle or sluggish tempered man; what is not faithful to her of its own will, a proud woman lets go where it may without effort, and with resignation, or with scorn, according as love or indifference move her to the faithless.

The first thing she saw on her table at Villafranca was a letter from her mother.

Lady Dolly had found the Caucasus quite stupidly like the Engadine; she thought St. Petersburg a huge barrack and hideous; the weather was horribly cold, and she was coming back to Paris as quickly as she could. She would just stay a day, passing, at the villa.

'Count Rostrow has not come up to her expectations of him,' thought Madame Nelaguine.

Vere said nothing.

If she could have prayed for anything, she would have prayed never to be near her mother. Lady Dolly was a living pain, a living shame, to her, now, even as she had been on that first

day when she had stepped on shore from the boat of Corrèze, and seen the figure of her mother in the black and yellow stripes of the bathing-dress out in the full sunshine of Trouville.

But Lady Dolly wanted to forget the slights of Count Rostrow; wanted to play at Monaco; wanted to be seen by her English friends with her daughter; and so Lady Dolly, who never studied any wishes but her own, and never missed a point in the game of self she always played, chose to come, and as she drove up between the laurel and myrtle hedges, and looked at the white walls and green verandahs of the villa, rising above the palms, and magnolias, and Indian coniferæ of its grounds, said to herself: 'With three such places on three seas, and two such houses in Paris and St. Petersburg as she has, what on earth *can* she want to be happy?'

Honestly, she could not understand it. It seemed to her very strange.

'But she is within a stone's throw of the tables, and she has oceans of money, and yet

she never plays,' she thought again; and this seemed to her yet more unnatural still.

'She is very odd in all ways,' she thought in conclusion, as the carriage brushed the scent out of the bruised arbutus leaves as it passed.

Life for Vere was quieter on the Riviera than elsewhere. There were but few people in the house; these spent nearly the whole of their time at Monte Carlo; and she had many of her own hours free to do with as she chose.

Her husband never asked her to go to Monte Carlo. It was the one phase of the world that he spared her. In himself he felt that he did not care for those grand grave eyes to see him throwing away his gold, and getting drunk with the stupid intoxication of that idiotic passion, with his *belles petites* about him, and the unlovely crowd around. Vere lived within a few miles of the brilliant Hell under the Tête du Chien, but she had never once set foot in it.

The change from the strong air of the Baltic to the hot and languid autumn weather

of the south affected her strength; she felt feverish and unwell. She had been reared in the fierce fresh winds of the north, and these rose-scented breezes and fragrant orange alleys seemed to stifle her in 'aromatic pain.'

'Perhaps I grow fretful and fanciful,' she thought, with a sudden alarm and anger at herself. 'What use is it for me to blame each place I live in? The malady is in myself. If I could only work, be of use, care for something, I should be well enough. If I could be free——'

She paused with a shiver.

Freedom for her could only mean death for her husband. To the sensitive conscience of Vere it seemed like murder to wish for any liberty or release that could only be purchased at such a cost as that.

Jeanne de Sonnaz could calmly reckon up and compare her chances of loss and gain if her placid Paul should pass from the living world; but Vere could do nothing of the kind. Although Sergius Zouroff outraged and insulted her in many ways, and was a daily and hourly

horror to her, yet she remained loyal to him, even in her thoughts.

'I eat his bread, and wear his clothes, and spend his gold,' she thought bitterly. 'I owe him at least fidelity such as his servants give in exchange for food and shelter!'

There were times when she was passionately tempted to cast off everything that was his, and go out, alone and unaided, and work for her living, hidden in the obscurity of poverty, but free at least from the horrible incubus of an abhorred union. But the straight and simple rectitude in which she had been reared, the severe rendering of honour and of obligation in which she had been trained, were with her, too strongly engrained to let her be untrue to them.

'I must bide the brent,' she told herself, in the old homely words of the Border people; and her delicate face grew colder and prouder every day. The iron was in her soul; the knotted cords were about her waist; but she bore a brave countenance serenely. She could not endure that her world should pity her.

Her world, indeed, never dreamed of doing

so. Society does not pity a woman who is a great lady, who is young, and who could have lovers and courtiers by the crowd if only she smiled once.

Society only thought her—unamiable.

True, she never said an unkind thing, or did one; she never hurt man or woman; she was generous to a fault, and, to aid even people she despised, would give herself trouble unending. But these are serious simple qualities that do not show much, and are soon forgotten by those who benefit from them. Had she laughed more, danced more, taken more kindly to the fools and their follies, she might have been acid of tongue and niggard of sympathy: society would have thought her much more amiable than it did now.

Her charities were very large, and they were charities often done in secresy to those of her own rank, who came to her in the desperation of their own needs, or their sons' or their brothers' debts of honour; but it would have served her in better stead with the world if she had stayed for the cotillons, or if she

had laughed heartily when Madame Judic sang.

It would have been so much more natural.

'If she would listen to me!' thought her mother, in the superior wisdom of her popular little life. 'If she would only kiss a few women in the morning, and flirt with a few men in the evening, it would set her all right with them in a month. It is no use doing good to anybody, they only hate you for it. You have seen them in their straits; it is like seeing them without their teeth or their wig; they never forgive it. But to be pleasant, always to be pleasant, that is the thing; and, after all, it costs nothing.'

But to be pleasant in Lady Dolly's, and the world's, meaning of the words was not possible to Vere—Vere, with an aching heart, an outraged pride, and a barren future; Vere, haughty, grave, and delicate of taste, to whom the whole life she led seemed hardly better or wiser than sitting out the glittering absurdities of the Timbale d'Argent or Niniche.

One warm day in December she had the

unusual enjoyment of being alone from noon to night. All in the house were away at Monte Carlo, and Madame Nelaguine had gone for the day to San Remo to see her Empress. It was lovely weather, balmy and full of fragrance, cold enough to make furs needful at nightfall, but without wind, and with a brilliant sun.

Vere wandered about the gardens till she was tired; then, her eyes lighting on her own felucca moored with other pleasure-boats at the foot of the garden-quay, she looked over the blue tranquil sea, went down the stairs, and pushed the little vessel off from shore. She had never lost her childish skill at boating and sailing. She set the little sail, tied the tiller-rope to her foot, and, with one oar, sent herself quickly and lightly through the still water. There was nothing in sight; the shore was as deserted as the sea. It was only one o'clock. The orange-groves and pine woods shed their sweet smell for miles over the sea. She ceased to row, and let the boat drift with the slight movement of the buoyant air.

She was glad to be alone—absolutely alone; away from all the trifling interruptions which are to some natures as mosquitoes to the flesh.

She passed a fishing-felucca, and asked the fisherman in it if the weather would hold; he told her it would be fine like that till the new year. She let the boat go on. The orangeries and pine woods receded farther and farther, the turrets of the villa grew smaller and smaller in the distance.

Air and sea, space and solitude, were delightful to her. Almost for the moment, going through that sparkling water, she realised her youth, and felt that twenty years were still not on her head. As she lay back in the little vessel, her shoulders resting on its silken cushions, the oar being idle, her eyes gazing wistfully into the depths of the azure sky, she did not see a canoe that, lying off the shore when she had taken the water, had followed her at a little distance.

Suddenly, with a quick, arrow-like dart, it covered the space dividing it from her; and came alongside of her boat.

'Princesse,' said the voice of Corrèze, 'the sea is kind to me, whether it be in north or south. But are you quite wise to be so far out on it all alone?'

He saw the face, that never changed for all the praise of princes or the homage of courts, and always was so cold, grow warm and lighten with surprise and welcome, wonder in the great grave eyes, a smile on the proud mouth.

'You!' she said simply.

He had had much flattery and much honour in his life, but nothing that had ever seemed to him so sweet, so great, as that one word, and the accent of it.

'I!' he said simply too, without compliment. 'I am a stormy petrel, you know; never at rest. I could not help hovering near your lonely sail in case of any sudden change of weather. These waters are very treacherous.'

'Are they?' said Vere without thinking. She grew confused; she thought of the Wolfinea, of the Kermesse, of her husband's invitation to Svir, of his last words in the Spitalkirche; of many things all at once; and the gladness

with which she saw him startled her—it seemed so strange to be so glad at anything!

'The fisherman says this weather will last till the new year,' she said, feeling that her voice was not quite steady.

Corrèze had one hand on the side of her boat.

'The fisherman should know better than I, certainly,' he answered. 'But they are over-sanguine sometimes; and there is a white look in the south that I do not like, as if Africa were sending us some squall. If I might venture to advise you, I would say turn your helm homeward. You are very far off shore.'

'You are as far.'

'I followed you.'

Vere was silent; she spent the next few moments in tacking and bringing the head of her little vessel landward once more.

'I thank you,' said Corrèze, as she obeyed him.

She did not ask him why.

'There is no tide, the clever people tell us,

in the Mediterranean,' he continued. 'But there is something that feels very unpleasantly like it sometimes, when a boat wants to go against the wind. You see a breeze has sprung up; that white cloud yonder will be black before very long.'

'Are we really very far from the land?'

'A mile or two. It will take some stiff rowing to get there.'

'But the sun is so bright——'

'Ah yes. I have seen the sun brilliant one moment, and the next the white squall was down in a fury of whirling mist and darkened air. Take your second oar.'

The wind began to stir, as he had foreseen, the white in the south grew leaden-coloured, the swell in the sea grew heavy. Vere took in her sail, and the resistance of the water to the oars grew strong for her hands.

'With your permission,' said Corrèze; and he balanced himself on his canoe, tied its prow to the stern of her boat, and leapt lightly into her little vessel.

'If it get rougher, that might have become

harder to do,' he said apologetically; 'and, in the sea that we shall soon have, you will be unable to both steer and row. Will you allow me to take your oars?'

She gave them to him in silence, and took the tiller ropes into her hands.

She saw that he was right.

An angry wind had risen, shrill and chill. The foam of the tideless sea was blowing around them like white powder scattered by a great fan. There was a raw, hard feeling in the air, a moment before so sunny and laden only with the scent of orange and pinewood. The sky was overcast, and some sea-birds were screaming.

Neither he nor she spoke; he bent with a will to his oars, she steered straight for the shore. The wind chopped and changed, and came now from the west and now from the mountains—either way it was against them.

He had taken a waterproof from his canoe and put it about her. 'Never trust the sun when you come seaward,' he said with a smile. Without it, she would have been wet through

from the spray, for her gown was only of ivory-white cashmere, and ill-fitted for rough weather.

Corrèze rowed on in silence, pulling hard against the heavy water.

Both thought of the morning on the sea in Calvados; and the memory was too present to both for either to speak of it.

'There is no real danger,' he said once, as the boat was swept by the rush of white water.

'I am not afraid; do you think I am?' said Vere with a momentary smile.

'No, I do not. Fear is not in your temper,' said Corrèze. 'But most other women would be; the sea will soon stand up like a stone wall between us and the land.'

'Yes?' said Vere absently; she was thinking very little of the sea; then she added, with a sudden recollection, and a pang of self-reproach, 'I was very imprudent; I am sorry; it is I who have brought you into this danger—for danger I think there must be.'

'Oh! as for that——' said Corrèze, and he laughed lightly. In his heart he thought, 'To

die with you—how sweet it would be! How right were the old poets!'

Peril, to a degree, there was, because it became very probable that the cockle-shell of a pleasure-boat might heel over in the wind and swell, and they might have to swim for their lives; and they were still a long way off the land. But neither of them thought much of it. He was only conscious that she was near him, and she was wondering why such deep peace, such sweet safety, always seemed to fall on her in his presence.

The sea rose, as he had said, and looked like a grey wall between them and the coast. Mists and blowing surf obscured the outlines of the land; but she held the head of the boat straight against the battling waves, and he rowed with the skill that he had learned of Venetians and Basque sea-folk in sudden storms; and, slowly but safely, at the last they made their way through the fog of foam, and whirling currents of variously driving winds, and brought the little vessel with the canoe rocking behind it, up on to the landing-stairs that she had left in

the full flood of sunshine two hours before. There was no rain, but the sky was very dark, and the spray was being driven hither and thither in showers.

'Are you wet at all, Princesse?' he asked as they landed.

She turned on the steps and held out her hand.

'You have saved my life,' she said in a low voice. He bowed low over her hand, but did not touch it with his lips.

'I am happy,' he said briefly.

There was a crowd of servants and out-door men above on the head of the little garden-quay, Loris leaping and shouting in their midst, for all the household had discovered its mistress's absence and the absence of the boat, and had been greatly alarmed; for if her world disliked her, her servants adored her, even while they were a little afraid of her.

'She is like no one else; she is a saint,' said the old Russian steward very often. 'But if she be ever in wrath with you—ah, then it is

as if St. Dorothea struck you with her roses and broke your back!'

Even as they landed the clouds burst, the rain began to fall in torrents, the sea leaped madly against the sea wall of the gardens.

'You will come in and wait at least till the storm passes?' she said to Corrèze. He hesitated.

'Into Prince Zouroff's house!' he said aloud, with a shadow on his face.

'Into my house,' she said with a shade of rebuke in her tone.

'You are too good, madame; but, if you will permit me, I will seem ungrateful and leave you.'

The servants were standing around on the strip of variegated marble pavement that separated the sea-wall from the house. He only uttered such words as they might hear.

Vere looked at him with a wistful look in the haughty eyes that he would not see.

'You have saved my life,' she said again in a soft hushed voice.

'Nay, nay,' said Corrèze, 'you have too many

angels surely ever about your steps to need a sorry mortal! Princesse—adieu.'

'But you are staying near here?'

'A few days—a few hours. I am *en route* from Milan to Paris. I like Paris best when I am not on an Alp. Life should be *tout ou rien*. Either the boulevard or the hermitage.'

He did not tell her that he had come by the Riviera for sake of seeing the turrets of her home above the sea, for sake of the chance of beholding her walk by him in the sun upon the terrace above.

'Will you not wait and see—my husband?' she said a little abruptly, with a certain effort.

'I have not the honour to know Prince Zouroff.'

'He will wish to thank you——' the words seemed to choke her; she could not finish them.

Corrèze bowed with his charming grace.

'Princesse! When shall I persuade you that I have done nothing for which to be thanked! If I may venture to remind you of so prosaic a thing, your dress must be damp,

and mine is wet through. I beseech you to change yours at once.'

'Ah! how thoughtless I am! But if you will not come in, will you accept a carriage or a horse?'

'Thanks, no; a quick walk will do me far more good. If you will give the canoe shelter I shall be very indebted; but for myself the shore in this wind is what will please me most. It will make me think of the old *tourmentes* of my home mountains. Princesse, once more—adieu.'

She gave him her hand; he bent over it; a mist came before her eyes that was not from the driving of the sea spray. When it cleared from her eyelids, Corrèze was gone.

'If I had entered the house with her I could not have answered for my silence. It was best to come away whilst I could,' he thought, as he went on along the Corniche, with the winds and the rains beating him back at each step, and, below him and beyond, the sea a mass of white and grey steam and froth.

When Prince Zouroff returned from Monte

Carlo, he brought several guests with him to dinner. He had won largely, as very rich men often do; he was in a good humour because he had been well amused; and he had been driven home by his orders at so terrific a pace in the storm that one horse had dropped dead when it reached the stables. But this was not a very uncommon occurrence with him; a carriage-horse did not matter; if it had been one of his racers it would have been a different business. That was all he said about it.

Vere went up to him after dinner and took him aside one moment.

'I was on the sea in the beginning of the storm.'

'What were you doing?'

'Rowing myself—all alone.'

'A mad freak! But nothing happened. All is well that ends well.'

'Yes.' Vere's teeth were shut a little as she spoke, and her lips were pale. 'It might not have ended so well—if it be well to live—had it not been for M. de Corrèze. He was in a canoe and warned me in time.'

'The singer?'

'M. de Corrèze.'

'Well, there is only one; you mean the singer? How came he near you?'

'I do not know.'

'And what did he do?'

'He saved my life.'

Sergius Zouroff looked wearied.

'You are always so emotional, *ma chère.* Do you mean he did anything I ought to acknowledge? Where is he to be found?'

'I do not know.'

'Oh, I can hear at the Cercle. But are you not talking in hyperboles?'

'I told you the fact. I thought you ought to know it.'

'Ah, yes,' said her husband, who was thinking of other things. 'But he did not come to sing at Svir. I cannot forgive that. However, I will send my card, and then you can ask him to dinner. Or send him a diamond ring—artists always like rings.'

Vere turned away.

'I remember hearing once,' said Lady

that Corrèze was staying, and sent also an invitation to dinner at an early date. Corrèze sent his card in return, and a refusal of the invitation, based on the plea that he was leaving Nice.

When he had written his refusal, Corrèze walked out into the street. He met point-blank a victoria with very gaudy liveries, and, in the victoria, muffled in sables, sat a dark-skinned, ruby-lipped woman.

The brilliant and insouciant face of Corrèze grew dark, and he frowned.

The woman was Casse-une-Croûte.

'The brute,' he muttered. 'If I sat at his table I should be choked—or I should choke him.'

As he went on he heard the gay people in the street laughing, and saw them look after the gaudy liveries and the quadroon.

'His wife is much more beautiful, and as white as a lily,' one man said. 'That black thing throws glasses and knives at him sometimes, they say.'

'I protected her from Noisette. I cannot

protect her here,' thought Corrèze. 'Perhaps she will not know it; God send her ignorance.'

The talk of Nice was Casse-une-Croûte, who had arrived but a week or so before. She had a villa in the town, she had her carriage and horses from Paris, she spent about sixty napoleons a day, without counting what she lost at Monte Carlo; the city preferred her to any English peeress or German princess of them all. When the correspondents of journals of society sent their budgets from Nice and Monaco, they spoke first of all of Casse-une-Croûte—the Princess Zouroff came far afterwards with other great ladies in their chronicles.

When Casse-une-Croûte after supper set fire to Prince Zouroff's beard, and shot away her chandelier with a saloon pistol, her feats were admiringly recorded in type. Vere did not read those papers, so she knew nothing; and the ignorance Corrèze prayed for her remained with her; she did not even know that Casse-une-Croûte was near her.

A little later in that day Corrèze met

Lady Dolly at Monte Carlo. She greeted him with effusion; he was courteous, but a little cold. She felt it, but she would not notice it.

'So you saved my Vere's life yesterday, Corrèze?' she said with charming cordiality. 'So like you! Always in some *beau rôle!*'

'It would be a *beau rôle*, indeed, to have saved the Princess Zouroff from any danger; but it is not for me. I warned her of the change in the weather; that was all.'

'You are too modest. True courage always is. I think you rowed her boat home for her, didn't you?'

'Part of the way—yes. The sea was heavy.'

'She quite *thinks* you saved her life,' said Lady Dolly. 'My sweet Vera is always a little *exaltée*, you know; you can see that if you look at her. One always rather expects to hear her speak in blank verse; don't you know what I mean?'

'Madame, I have heard so much blank verse in my life that I should as soon expect frogs to drop from her lips,' answered Corrèze a little irritably. 'No; I do not think I

know what you mean, the Princess Vera seems to me to play a very difficult part in the world's play with an exquisite serenity, patience, and good taste.'

'A difficult part! Goodness! My dear Corrèze, she has only to look beautiful, go to courts, and spend money!'

'And forgive infidelity, and bear with outrage.'

His voice was low, but it was grave and even stern, as his face was.

Lady Dolly, who was going up towards the great Palace of Play, stopped, stared, and put up a scarlet sunshade, which made her look as if she blushed.

'My dear Corrèze! I suppose people of genius are privileged, but otherwise—really—you have said such an extraordinary thing I ought not to answer you. The idea of judging between married people! The idea of supposing that Prince Zouroff is not everything he ought to be to his wife——'

Corrèze turned his clear lustrous eyes full on her.

'Miladi,' he said curtly, 'I wrote you some truths of Prince Zouroff from Moscow long ago. Did you read them?'

'Oh—stories! mere stories!' said Lady Dolly vaguely and nervously, 'you know I never listen to rumours; people are so horridly uncharitable.'

'You had my letter from Moscow then?'

'Oh yes, and answered it,' said Lady Dolly with *aplomb*.

'I think you forgot to answer it,' said Corrèze quietly; 'your answer was a *faire part* to the marriage.'

'I am sure I answered it,' said Lady Dolly once more, looking up into the scarlet dome of her umbrella.

'I told you and proved to you that the man to whom you wished to sacrifice your child was a mass of vice; of such vice as it is the fashion to pretend to believe shut up between the pages of Suetonius and Livy. And I offered, if you would give me your young daughter, to settle a million of francs upon her and leave the stage for her sake. Your answer was the *faire part* of the Zouroff marriage.'

'I answered you,' said Lady Dolly obstinately, 'oh dear yes, I did. I can't help it if you didn't get it; and I had told you at Trouville it was no use, that idea of yours; you never were meant to marry—so absurd!—you are far too charming; and, besides, you know you *are* an artist; you can't say you are not.'

'I am an artist,' said Corrèze, with a flash sombre and brilliant in his eyes that she could not front, 'but I have never been a beast, and had I wedded your daughter I would not have been an adulterer.'

'Hus-s-sh!' said Lady Dolly, scandalised. Such language was terrible to her, though she did laugh at the Petit Duc and Niniche. 'Hus-s-sh, hush—*pray!*'

But Corrèze had bowed and had left her.

Lady Dolly went on between the cactus and the palms and the myrtles looking dreamily up into the scarlet glow of her sunshade, and thinking that when you let artists and people of that sort into your world they were quite certain to *froisser* you sooner or later. 'And I am sure he is in love with her still,' she thought

as she joined some pleasant people and went up to the great building to hear the music, only for that; the music at Monte Carlo is always so good.

'As if I would ever have given my child to a singer!' she thought in the disgust of mingled virtue and pride.

At the entrance of the hall she met her son-in-law, who was coming out, having won largely.

'I forgot my purse, Sergius; lend me the sinews of war,' said Lady Dolly with a laugh.

He handed her some *rouleaux*.

'Some one would plunder me before I got through the gardens,' he said to himself as he sauntered on, 'it may as well be Dolly as another.'

Lady Dolly went on and staked her gold. At the same table with her were Aimée Pincée of the Hippodrome, and Casse-une-Croûte; but Lady Dolly was not hurt by that either in pride or virtue.

The real Commune is Monte Carlo.

Meanwhile Corrèze did not approach Vere,

'If you ever need a servant or an avenger call me,' he had said to her, but he had known that she never would call him. From afar off he had kept watch on her life, but that was all.

She knew that he was near her, and the knowledge changed the current of her days from a joyless routine to a sweet yet bitter unrest. When the sun rose she thought, 'shall I see him?' When it set she thought, 'will he come to-morrow?' The expectation gave a flush of colour and hope to her life which with all its outward magnificence was chill and pale as the life of a pauper because its youth was crushed under the burden of a loveless splendour.

For the first time this warm winter of the southern seaboard, with its languid air, its dancing sunbeams, its odours of roses and violets and orange-buds seemed lovely to her. She did not reason; she did not reflect; she only vaguely felt that the earth had grown beautiful.

Once while the air was still dark with the shadows of night, but the sky had the red of

the dawn, she, lying wide awake upon her bed, heard a voice upon the sea beneath her windows singing the *stella virgine, madre pescatore!* of the Italian fishermen, and knew that the voice was his.

At that hour Sergius Zouroff was drinking brandy in the rooms of Casse-une-Croûte, while the quadroon was shooting the glass drops off her chandelier.

One day she went to see the village priest about some poor of the place, and sought him at the church of the parish. It was a little whitewashed barn, no more, but it had thickets of roses about it and a belt of striped aloes, and two tall palms rose straight above it, and beyond its narrow door there shone the sea. She went towards the little sacristy to speak to the priest. Madame Nelaguine was with her. They met Corrèze on the threshold. Mass was just over. It was the day of St. Lucy.

'Have you been to mass at our church and do not visit us?' cried Princess Nadine in reproach as she saw him; 'that is not kind, monsieur, especially when we have so much

for which to thank you; my brother would be very glad of an occasion to speak his gratitude.'

'Prince Zouroff owes me none, madame,' said Corrèze. Vere had been silent. 'Is the little church yours?' he continued. 'It is charming. It is almost as primitive as St. Augustine or St. Jerome could wish it to be, and it is full of the smell of the sea and the scent of the roses.

'It is the church of our parish,' said Madame Nelaguine; 'we have our own chapel in the villa for our own priest, of course. Were you not coming to us? No? You are too *farouche*. Even to persons of your fame one cannot allow such wilful isolation; and why come to this very gay seaboard if you want to be alone?'

'I came by way of going to Paris from Milano; indeed, in Paris I must be in a very few days; I have to see half a score of directors there. Which of the three seas that you honour with residence do you prefer, mesdames?'

'Why does Vere not speak to him, and why

does he not look at her?' thought the Princess Nelaguine, as she answered aloud:

'Myself, I infinitely prefer the Mediterranean, but Vere persists in preferring the narrow colourless strip of the northern channel; it is not like her usual good taste.'

'The climate of Calvados is most like that which the Princess knew in her childhood,' Corrèze said with a little haste; 'childhood goes with us like an echo always, a refrain to the ballad of our life. One always wants one's cradle-air. Were I to meet with such an accident as Roger did I would go to a goat-hut on my own Alps above Sion.'

'You would? how charming that would be for the goats and their sennerins!' said Madame Nelaguine as she caught a glimpse of the priest's black *soutane* behind the roses and chased it through the hedge of aloes and caught the good man, who was very shy of this keen, quick, sardonic Russian lady.

'You might have been dead in those seas the other day—for me,' said Vere, in a low voice without looking at him as they stood alone.

'Ah! nothing so beautiful is in store for me, Princesse,' he answered lightly; 'indeed, you overrate my services; without me no doubt you would have brought your boat in very well; you are an accomplished sailor.'

'I should have stayed out without noticing the storm,' said Vere, 'and then—Loris would have been sorry, perhaps.'

Corrèze was silent.

He would not let his tongue utter the answer that rose to his lips.

'We are too afraid of death,' he said; 'that fear is the shame of Christianity.'

'I do not fear it,' said Vere in a low tone; her eyes gazed through the screen of roses to the sea.

'And you have not twenty years on your head yet!' said Corrèze bitterly, 'and life should be to you one cloudless spring morning only full of blossom and of promise——'

'I have what I deserve, no doubt.'

'You have nothing that you deserve.'

Madame Nelaguine came back to them with the priest.

'Why did you not come to Svir?' she asked of Corrèze, as the curate made his obeisance to Vere.

'I had not the honour to know your brother.'

'No; but I believe——'

'He offered to pay me? Oh yes. He was *dans son droit* in doing that; but I too had my rights, and amongst them was the right to refuse, and I took it. No doubt he did not know that I never take payments out of the opera-house.'

'I see! you are cruelly proud.'

'Am I proud? Perhaps, I have my own idea of dignity, a "poor thing, but my own." When I go into society I like to be free, and so I do not take money from it. Many greater artists than I, no doubt, have thought differently. But it is my fancy.'

'But other artists have not been Marquises de Corrèze,' said Madame Nelaguine.

'Nay, I have no title, Madame,' said Corrèze; 'it was buried in another generation under the snows above Sion, and I have never dug it up: why should I?'

'Why should you, indeed? There is but one Corrèze, there are four thousand marquises to jostle each other in their struggles for precedence.'

He laughed a little as he bowed to her. 'Yes, I am Corrèze *tout court*; I like to think that one word tells its own tale all over the world to the nations. No doubt this is only another shape of vanity, and not dignity at all. One never knows oneself. I do not care to set up my old *couronne*, it would be out of place in the theatres. But I like to think that I have it, and if ever I need to cross swords with a noble, he cannot refuse on the score of my birth.'

His face grew darker as he spoke, he pulled the roses one from another with an impatient action; the quick marmoset eyes of Madame Nelaguine saw that he was thinking of some personal foe.

'I suppose you have had duels before now?' she said indifferently.

'No,' answered Corrèze. 'No man ever insulted me yet, and I think no man ever will.

I do not like brawling; it is a sort of weakness with my fraternity, who are an irritable genus. I have always contrived to live in amity. But —there are offences for which there is no punishment except the old one of blood.'

He was thinking of what he had seen that night; Sergius Zouroff against the shoulder of Casse-une-Croûte playing at the roulette table whilst his wife was left alone. Madame Nelaguine looked at him narrowly; Vere was standing a little apart listening to the good priest's rambling words.

'M. le Marquis,' she said with a little smile, 'you are very well known to be the gentlest and sunniest of mortals, as well as the sweetest singer that ever lived. But—do you know—I think you could be very terrible if you were very angry. I think it is quite as well that you do not fight duels.'

'I may fight them yet,' said Corrèze, 'and do not give me that title, madame, or I shall think you laugh at me. I am only Corrèze!'

'Only! "I am Arthur, said the King!" Will you not be merciful in your greatness—and

come and sing to us as a friend here, though you would not come as a guest to Svir?'

Corrèze was silent.

'Do come to-night, you would make me so proud; we have a few people,' urged the Princess Nadine; 'and you know,' she added, 'that to me your art is a religion.'

'You make it difficult indeed to refuse,' said Corrèze, 'but I have not the honour to know Prince Zouroff.'

'With what an accent he says that honour!' thought the sister of Zouroff, but she said aloud: 'That is my brother's misfortune, not his fault. Vere, ask this *Roi Soleil* to shine on our house? He is obstinate to me. Perhaps he will not be so to you.'

Vere did not lift her eyes, her face flushed a little as she turned towards him.

'We should be happy if you would break your rule—for us.'

She spoke with effort; she could not forget what he had said on his knees before her in the little church at Old Aussee. Corrèze bowed.

her mother was away spending a day or two with a friend who had a villa at la Condamine. She had never once driven down the Promenade des Anglais since she had been on the Riviera this year, but this day her coachman took his way along that famous road because the house to which she was going, a house taken by Vlademir Zouroff, and at which his wife, a pretty Galician woman, lay ill, could not so quickly or so easily be reached any other way. She drove alone, her only companion Loris stretched on the opposite cushions, beside a basket of violets and white lilacs which she was taking to Sophie Zouroff. The afternoon was brilliant; the snow-white palaces, the green gardens, and the azure sea sparkled in the sunlight; the black Orloffs flew over the ground tossing their silver head-pieces and flashing their fiery eyes; people looked after them and told one another 'That is the Princess Vera: look, that is the great Russian's wife.'

Vere leaning back with Loris at her feet, had a white covering of polar bear-skins

cast over her; she had on her the black sables which had been in her marriage *corbeille*; the black and white in their strong contrast enhanced and heightened the beauty of her face and the fairness of her hair; she held on her lap a great cluster of lilies of the valley.

'That beautiful pale woman is Prince Zouroff's wife; he must have strange taste to leave her for a negress,' said one man to another, as she passed.

There were many carriages out that day as usual before sunset; the black Russian horses dashed through the crowd at their usual headlong gallop, tossing their undocked manes and tails in restless pride. Close against them passed two bays at full trot; the bays were in a victoria; in the victoria was a woman, swarthy and lustrous-eyed, who wore a Russian kaftan, and had black Russian sables thrown about her shoulders; she was smoking; she blew some smoke in the air and grinned from ear to ear as she went past the Zouroff carriage;

in her own carriage, lying back in it, was Sergius Zouroff.

A slight flush, that went over Vere's face to her temples and then faded to leave her white as new fallen snow, was the only sign she gave that she had recognised her husband with the quadroon who was called Casse-une-Croûte. Another moment, and the black Orloffs, flying onward in a cloud of dust and flood of sunlight, had left the bays behind them. Vere bent her face over the lilies of the valley.

Half a mile further she checked their flight, and told the coachman to return home by another road instead of going onward to Sophie Zouroff's.

When she reached the villa it was twilight —the short twilight of a winter day on the Mediterranean. She went up to her bed-chamber, took off her sables, and with her own hands wrapped them altogether, rang for her maid, and gave the furs to her.

'When the Prince comes in take these to him,' she said, in a calm voice; 'tell him I have no farther use for them; he may have some.'

The woman, who was faithful to her, and

knew much of the patience with which she bore her life, looked grave as she took them; she guessed what had happened.

It was six o'clock.

The Princess Nadine came for a cup of yellow tea in Vere's dressing-room. She found her gentle and serious as usual; as usual a good listener to the babble of pleasant cynicisms and philosophic commentaries with which Madame Nelaguine always was ready to garnish and enliven the news of the hour.

Madame Nelaguine did not notice anything amiss.

An hour later, when Zouroff came home to dress for dinner, the waiting-woman, who loved her mistress and was very loyal to her, took him the sables and the message.

He stared, but said nothing. He understood.

The Prince of Monaco and other Princes dined at the Zouroff villa that evening. There was a dinner party of forty people in all. He did not see his wife until the dinner hour. Vere was pale with the extreme pallor that had

come on her face at sight of the quadroon; she wore white velvet and had a knot of white lilac at her breast, and her only ornaments were some great pearls given her by the Herberts on her marriage.

He stooped towards her a moment under pretext of raising a handkerchief she had dropped.

'Madame,' he said in a harsh whisper, 'I do not like *coups de théâtre*, and with my actions you have nothing to do. You will wear your sables and drive on the Promenade des Anglais to-morrow. Do you hear?' he added, as she remained silent. Then she looked at him.

'I hear; but I shall not do it.'

'You will not do it?'

'No.'

Their guests entered. Vere received them with her usual cold and harmonious grace.

'Really she is a grand creature,' thought Zouroff, with unwilling respect, 'but I will break her will; I never thought she had any until this year; now she is stubborn as a mule.'

The long dinner went on its course, and was followed by an animated evening. Madame Nelaguine had always made the Zouroff entertainments more brilliant than most, from their surprises, their vivacity, and their *entrain*, and this was no exception to the rest.

That Prince Zouroff himself was gloomy made no cause for remark; he never put any curb on his temper either for society or in private life, and the world was used to his fits of moroseness. 'The Tsar sulks' his sister would always say, with a laugh, of him; and so covered his ill-humour with a jest. This night she did not jest: her fine instincts told her that there was a storm in the air.

About eleven o'clock everyone was in the white drawing-room, called so because it was hung with white silk, and had white china mirrors and chandeliers. Two clever musicians, violinist and pianist, had executed some pieces of Liszt and Schumann; they were gone, and two actors from the Folies Dramatiques had glided in as Louis XIII. personages, played a witty little *revue*, written for the society of the hour,

and had in turn vanished. Throughout the long white room—in which the only colour allowed came from banks and pyramids of rose-hued azaleas—there was on every side arising that animated babel of polite tongues which tells a hostess that her people are well amused with her and with themselves, and that the spectre of ennui is scornfully exorcised.

Suddenly the doors opened, and the servants announced Corrèze.

'*Quel bonheur!*' cried Madame Nelaguine; and muttered to her brother, 'Say something cordial and graceful, Sergius; you can when you like.'

Corrèze was bending low before the mistress of the house; for the first time he saw the moth and the star at her throat.

'Present me to M. de Corrèze, Vera,' said her husband, and she did so.

'I owe you much, and I am happy to be able in my own house to beg you to believe in my gratitude, and to command it when you will,' said Zouroff, with courtesy and the

admirable manner which he could assume with suavity and dignity when he chose.

'I was more weatherwise than a fisherman, monsieur; that is all the credit I can claim,' said Corrèze, lightly and coldly: everyone had ceased their conversation, men had lost their interest in women's eyes, the very princes present grew eager, and were thrown into the shade. Corrèze had come. Corrèze, with the light on his poetic face, his grace of attitude, his sweet, far-reaching voice, his past of conquest, his present of victory, his halo of fame, his sorcery of indifference.

Corrèze stood by the side of his hostess, and there was a gleam of challenge in his eyes, usually so dreamy, this night so luminous; he was as pale as she.

'I came to sing some songs to mesdames, your sister, and your wife,' said Corrèze, a little abruptly to Zouroff. 'Is that your piano? You will permit me?'

He moved to it quickly.

'He knows why he is asked to come,' thought Zouroff, 'but he speaks oddly; one

would think he were the prince and I the artist!'

'He is a rarer sort of prince than you,' murmured Madame Nelaguine, who guessed his thoughts. 'Do not touch him rudely, or the nightingale will take wing.'

Corrèze struck one loud chord on the notes, and through the long white room there came a perfect silence.

Not thrice in twelve months was he ever heard out of his own opera-houses.

He paused with his hands on the keys; he looked down the drawing-room, all he saw of all that was around him were a sea of light, a bloom of rose-red flowers, a woman's figure in white velvet, holding a white fan of ostrich feathers in her hand, and with a knot of white lilac at her breast. He closed his eyelids rapidly one instant as a man does who is dazzled by flame or blinded with a mist of tears; then he looked steadily down the white room and sang a Noël of Felicien David's.

Never in all his nights of triumph had he sung more superbly. He was still young, and

his voice was in its perfection. He could do what he chose with it, and he chose to-night to hold that little crowd of tired great people hanging on his lips as though they were sheep that hearkened to Orpheus.

He chose to show her husband and her world what spell he could use, what power he could wield; a charm that their riches could not purchase, a sorcery their rank could not command. He was in the mood to sing, and he sang, as generously as in his childhood he had warbled his wood-notes wild to the winds of the mountains; as superbly, and with as exquisite a mastery and science as he had ever sung with to the crowded theatres of the great nations of the world.

The careless and fashionable crowd listened, and was electrified into emotion. It could not resist; men were dumb and women heard with glistening eyes and aching hearts; Sergius Zouroff, for whom music rarely had any charm, as he heard that grand voice rise on the stillness, clear as a clarion that calls to war, and then sink and fall to a sweetness of

scarcely mortal sound, owned its influence, and as he sat with his head downward, and his heavy eyelids closed, felt dully and vaguely that he was vile, and Deity perchance not all a fable; and shuddered a little, and felt his soul shrink before the singer's as Saul's in its madness before David.

When Corrèze paused all were silent. To give him compliment or gratitude would have seemed almost as unworthy an insult as to give him gold.

Vere had not moved; she stood before the bank of azaleas quite motionless; she might have been of marble for any sign she gave.

Corrèze was silent; there was no sound in the white room except the murmur of the waves without against the sea-wall of the house.

Suddenly he looked up, and the brilliant flash of his gaze met Sergius Zouroff's clouded and sullen eyes.

'I will sing once more,' said Corrèze, who had risen; and he sat down again to the piano. 'I will sing once more, since you are not

weary of me. I will sing you something that you never heard.'

His hands strayed over the chords in that improvisation of music which comes to the great singer as the sudden sonnet to the poet, as the burst of wrath to the orator. Corrèze was no mere interpreter of other men's melody; he had melody in his brain, in his hands, in his soul.

He drew a strange pathetic music from the keys; a music sad as death, yet with a ring of defiance in it, such defiance as had looked from his eyes when he had entered, and had stood by the side of the wife of Zouroff.

He sang La Coupe of Sully Prudhomme; the Coupe d'Or that he had quoted on the sands by the North Sea at Schevening.

'Dans les verres épais du cabaret brutal,
Le vin bleu coule à flots, et sans trève à la ronde.
Dans le calice fin plus rarement abonde,
Un vin dont la clarté soit digne du cristal.

Enfin, la coupe d'or du haut d'un piédestal
Attend, vide toujours, bien que large et profonde,
Un cru dont la noblesse à la sienne réponde:
On tremble d'en souiller l'ouvrage et le métal.'

He sang it to music of his own, eloquent, weird, almost terrible; music that seemed to search the soul as the rays of a lamp probe dark places.

The person he looked at while he sang was Sergius Zouroff.

Les verres épais du cabaret brutal!

The words rang down the silence that was around him with a scorn that was immeasurable, with a rebuke that was majestic.

Sergius Zouroff listened humbly as if held under a spell, his eyes could not detach their gaze from the burning scorn of the singer.

Les verres épais du cabaret brutal!

The line was thundered through the stillness with a challenge and a meaning that none who heard it could doubt, with a passion of scorn that cut like a scourge and spared not.

Then his voice dropped low, and with the tenderness of an unutterable yearning recited the verse he had not spoken by the sea.

'Plus le vase est grossier de forme et de matière,
Mieux il trouve à combler sa contenance entière,
Aux plus beaux seulement il n'est point de liqueur.'

There was once more a great silence. Vere still stood quite motionless.

Sergius Zouroff leaned against the white wall with his head stooped and his eyes sullen and dull, with an unwilling shame.

Corrèze rose and closed the piano.

'I came to sing; I have sung; you will allow me to leave you now, for I must go away by daybreak to Paris.'

And though many tried to keep him, none could do so, and he went.

Vere gave him her hand as he passed out of the white drawing-room.

'I thank you,' she said very low.

The party broke up rapidly; there was a certain embarrassment and apprehension left on all the guests; there was not one there who had not understood the public rebuke given to Sergius Zouroff.

He had understood it no less.

But for his pride's sake, which would not let him own he felt the disgrace of it, he would have struck the lips of the singer dumb. When the white room was empty, he paced to and fro

with quick, uneven steps. His face was livid, his eyes were savage, his breath came and went rapidly and heavily; for the first time in all his years a man had rebuked him.

'You asked him here to insult me?' he cried, pausing suddenly before his wife. She looked him full in the face.

'No. There would be no insult in a poem unless your conscience made it seem one.'

She waited a moment for his answer, but he was silent; he only stared at her with a stifled, bitter oath; she made a slight curtsey to him, and left his presence without another word.

'You should honour his courage, Sergius,' said Madame Nelaguine, who remained beside him; 'you must admit it was *very* courageous.'

A terrible oath was his answer.

'Courageous!' he said savagely at last. 'Courageous? The man knows well enough that it is impossible for me to resent a mere song; I should be ridiculous, *farceur*, and he knows that I cannot fight him—he is a stage-singer——'

'He thinks himself your equal,' she answered quietly; 'but probably your wife is right, it is only your conscience makes you see an insult in a poem.'

'My conscience!'—Sergius Zouroff laughed aloud; then he said suddenly, 'Is he Vera's lover?'

'You are a fool,' said the Princesse Nadine with tranquil scorn. 'Your wife has never had any lover, and I think never will have one. And what lover would rebuke *you*? Lovers are like husbands—they condone.'

'If he be not her lover why should he care?'

Madame Nelaguine shrugged her shoulders.

'My dear Sergius, people are different. Some feel angry at things that do not in the least concern them, and go out of their way to redress wrongs that have nothing to do with them; they are the *exaltés* members of the world. Corrèze is one of them. Have you not said he is an artist? Now, I am no artist, and never am *exaltée*, and yet I also do not like to see the golden cup cast aside for the *cabaret brutal*. Good night.'

Then she too left him.

The next day Madame Nelaguine went up to her sister-in-law on the sea-terrace of the house. Vere was sitting by the statue of the wingless Love; she had a book in her hand, but she was not reading, her face was very calm, but there was a sleepless look in her eyes. The Princesse Nadine, who never in her life had known any mental or physical fear, felt afraid of her; she addressed her a little nervously.

'Have you slept well, love?'

'Not at all,' said Vere, who did not speak falsely in little things or large.

'Ah!' sighed Madame Nelaguine, and added wistfully, 'Vera, I want to ask you to be still patient, to do nothing in haste; in a word, to forgive still if you can. My dear, I am so pained, so shocked, so ashamed of all the insults my brother offers you, but he has had a lesson very grandly given,—it may profit him, it may not; but in any way, Vera, as a woman of the world who yet can love you, my love, I want to entreat you for all our sakes, and your own above all, not to separate yourself from my brother.'

Vere, who had her eyes fixed on the distant snows of the mountains of Esterelle, turned and looked at her with a surprise and with something of rebuke.

'You mean?—I do not think I understand you.'

'I mean,' murmured her sister-in-law almost nervously, 'do not seek for a divorce.'

'A divorce!'

Vere echoed the words in a sort of scorn.

'You do not know me much yet,' she said calmly. 'The woman who can wish for a divorce and drag her wrongs into public—such wrongs!—is already a wanton herself; at least I think so.'

Madame Nelaguine breathed a little quickly with relief, yet with a new apprehension.

'You are beyond me, Vera, and in your own way you are terribly stern.'

'What do you wish me to be?' said Vere tranquilly. 'If I were of softer mould I should make your brother's name the shame of Europe. Be grateful to my coldness; it is his only shield.'

'But you suffer——'

'That is nothing to anyone. When I married Prince Zouroff I knew very well that I should suffer always. It is not his fault; he cannot change his nature.'

His sister stood beside her and pulled the yellow tea-roses absently.

'You are altogether beyond me,' she said hurriedly, 'and yet you are not a forgiving woman, Vera?'

'Forgiveness is a very vague word; it is used with very little thought. No, I do not forgive, certainly. But I do not avenge myself by giving my name to the mob, and telling the whole world things that I blush even to know!'

'Then you would never separate yourself from Sergius?'

'I may leave his roof if he try me too far, I have thought of it; but I will never ask the law to set me free from him. What could the law do for me? It cannot undo what is done. A woman who divorces her husband is a prostitute legalised by a form; that is all.'

'You think fidelity due to the faithless?'

'I think fidelity is the only form of chastity left to a woman who is a wife; the man's vices cannot affect the question. I abhor your brother, I could strike him as a brave man strikes a coward, but I have taken an oath to him and I will be true to it. What has the law to do with one's own honour?'

'It is happy for him that you have such unusual feeling,' said Madame Nelaguine with a little acrimony, because she herself had been far from guiltless as a wife. 'But your knight? your defender? your hero with the golden nightingale in his throat, are you as cold to him? Did you not see that while he sang his heart was breaking, and he would have been glad if his song had been a sword?'

They were imprudent words and she knew it, yet she could not resist the utterance of them; for even in her admiration of Vere a certain bitterness and a certain impatience moved her against a grandeur of principle that appeared to her strained and out of nature.

Vere, who was sitting leaning a little back against the sea-wall, raised herself and sat

erect; a warmth of colour came upon her face, her eyes grew angered and luminous.

'I will not affect to misunderstand you,' she said tranquilly, 'but you misunderstand both him and me. Long, long ago I think he could have loved me, and I—could have loved him. But fate had it otherwise. He is my knight, you say—perhaps—but only as they were knights in days of old, without hope and without shame. I think you had no need to say this to me, and, perhaps, no right to say it.'

The Princess Nadine touched her hand reverently. 'No, I had no right, Vera. But I thank you for answering me so. Dear—you are not of our world. You live in it, but it does not touch you. Your future is dark, but you bear the lamp of honour in your hand. We think the light old-fashioned and dull, but it burns in dark places where we, without it, stumble and fall. Corrèze did not sing in vain; my brother, I think, will say no more to you of the sables and the Promenade des Anglais.'

'It matters very little whether he does or

no,' said Vere, 'I should not drive there, and he knows it. Will you be so good as not to speak to me again of these things? I think words only make them harder to bear, and seem to lower one to the level of the women who complain.'

'But to speak is so natural——'

'Not to me.'

It was three o'clock in the December day; the *mistral* was blowing, although in this sheltered nook of the bay of Villafranca it was but little felt, the sky was overcast, the waves were rolling in heavy with surf, little boats, going on their way to Sans Soupir or Saint Jean, ploughed through deep waters.

Vere moved towards the house.

Madame Nelaguine went down towards the garden to visit the young palms she was rearing for the palace in the Newski Prospect, where heated air was to replace the lost south to them, as the fever of society replaces the dreams of our youth.

Her husband met Vere in the entrance and stopped her there; his face was reddened and

dark; his heavy jaw had the look of the bull-dog's; his eyes had a furtive and ferocious glance; it was the first time they had met since she had curtsied to him her good-night. He barred her way into the entrance chamber.

'Madame, the horses are ready,' he said curtly, 'go in and put on your sables.'

She lifted her eyes, and a great contempt spoke in them; with her lips she was silent.

'Do you hear me?' he repeated, 'go in and put on your sables; I am waiting to drive with you.'

'Along the Promenade des Anglais?' she said, very calmly.

'On the Promenade des Anglais,' repeated Zouroff; 'do you need twice telling?'

'Though you tell me a hundred times, I will not drive there.'

He swore a great oath.

'I told you what you were to do last night. Last night you chose to have me insulted by an opera-singer; do you suppose that changed my resolve? When I say a thing it is done; go in and put on your sables.'

'I will never put them on again; and I will not drive with you!'

Rage held him speechless for a moment. Then he swore a great oath.

'Go in and put on your sables, or I will teach you how a Russian can punish rebellion. You insulted me by the mouth of an opera-singer, who had your orders no doubt what to sing. You shall eat dust to-day; that I swear.'

Vere gave a little gesture of disdain.

'Do you think you can terrify me?' she said tranquilly. 'We had better not begin to measure insults. My account against you is too heavy to be evenly balanced on that score.'

The calmness of her tone and of her attitude lashed him to fury.

'By God! I will beat you as my father did his serfs!' he muttered savagely, as he seized her by the arm.

'You can do so if you chose. The Tsar has not enfranchised *me*. But make me drive as you say, where you say, that is beyond your power.'

She stood facing him on the terrace; the

angry sea and clouded sky beyond her. Her simple dignity of attitude impressed him for an instant with shame and with respect; but his soul was set on enforcing his command. She had had him humiliated by the mouth of a singer; and he was resolved to avenge the humiliation; and having said this thing, though he was ashamed of it, he would not yield nor change.

He pulled her towards him by both hands, and made her stand before him.

'You shall learn all that my power means, madame. I am your master; do you deny me obedience?'

'In things that are right, no.'

'Right—wrong! What imbecile's words are those? I bid you do what I choose. You insulted me by your singer's mouth last night; I will make you eat dust to-day.'

Vere looked him full in the face.

'I said we had better not measure insults; I have had too many to count them, but at last they may pass one's patience—yours has passed mine.'

'Body of Christ!' he cried savagely, 'what were you? Did I not buy you? What better are you than that other woman who has my sables except that I bought you at a higher cost? Have you never thought of that? You high-born virgins who are offered up for gold, how are you so much nobler and higher than the *jolies impures* whom you pretend to despise?'

'I have thought of it every day and night since I was made your wife. But you know very well that I did not marry you for either rank or riches, neither for any purpose of my own.'

'No? For what did you then?'

Vere's voice sank very low, so low that the sound of the sea almost drowned it.

'To save my mother—you know that.'

The face of her husband changed, and he let go his hold of her wrists.

'What did she tell you?' he muttered; 'what did she tell you?'

'She told me she was in your debt; that she could not pay you; that you had letters of

hers to some one—she did not say to whom—that placed her in your power; and you had threatened to use your power unless I—But you must know all that very well; better than I do. It seemed to me right to sacrifice myself; now I would not do it; but then I was such a child, and she prayed to me in my father's name ——'

She paused suddenly, for Zouroff laughed aloud; a terrible jarring laugh that seemed to hurt the peace and silence around.

'What a liar! what a liar always!' he muttered, 'and with it all how pretty, and empty-headed, and harmless she looks—my Lady Dolly!'

Then he laughed again.

'Was it not true?' said Vere.

A great cold and a great sickness came over her: the look upon her husband's face frightened her as his rage had had no power to do.

'True? was what true?'

'That she was in your power?'

His eyes did not meet hers.

'Yes—no. She had had plenty of my

money, but that was no matter,' he answered her in a strange forced voice, 'she—she had paid me; there was no cause to frighten you, to coerce you.'

Then he laughed again—a dissonant cruel laugh, that hurt his wife more than the bruise he had left upon her wrists.

'Was it not true?' she muttered again wearily; she trembled a little.

'Be quiet!' said her husband roughly, with the colour passing over his face again like a hot wind, 'do not talk of it; do not think of it; she wished you to marry me, and she was —well, in a sense she was afraid, and wished to muzzle me. Ah! those dainty ladies! and they think to meet the *lionnes* in the Passage des Anglais is pollution!'

Then he laughed yet again.

Vere felt a faintness steal over her, she felt terror—she knew not of what nor why.

'Then my mother deceived me!'

His eyes looked at her strangely in a fleeting glance.

'Yes, she deceived you!' he said briefly.

'In a sense she was afraid of me; but not so—not so.'

His dark brows frowned, and his face grew very troubled and full of a dusky red of shame. Vere was mute.

'It is of no use speaking of it now; your mother never could be true to anyone,' he said, with an effort. 'I am—sorry. You were misled—but it is of no use now—it is too late. Give the sables to the first beggar you meet. That damned singer was right last night; you are a cup of gold and I—like best the trough where the swine drink!'

Vere stood motionless and mute, a vague terror of some unknown thing unnerved her and paralysed her dauntless courage, her proud tranquillity; she felt that for her mother this man who was before her had a scorn as boundless as any he could feel for the basest creatures of the world: and for once she was a coward, for once she dared not ask the truth.

Zouroff stood still a moment, looked at her wistfully, then bowed to her with deep respect, and turned away in silence. A little while

later he was driving rapidly through Eza to the Casino of Monte Carlo.

His sister came to Vere anxiously as she saw his horses drive away.

'I hope he was not violent, my dear?'

'No.'

'And he did not speak of your driving on that road?'

'He did not enforce it.'

Vere spoke feebly, her teeth chattered a little as with cold; she had sat down by the balustrade of the terrace and had a stupefied look like the look of some one who has had a blow or fall.

'I am thankful my children died at their birth,' she said after some moments, in a voice so low that it scarcely stirred the air.

Then she got up, drew a shawl about her and went once more towards the house; a great darkness was upon her; she felt as in the Greek tragedies which she had read in her childhood, those felt who were pursued, innocent, yet doomed by the Furies for their mothers' sins.

Meanwhile, her husband was driving against

the hot south-east wind across the Place du Palais of Monaco.

He was thinking—'the quadroon is a beast of prey but she is honesty itself beside half the women in society, the delicate dainty dames that we flirt with in the ballroom alcoves, and lift our hats to as they go by in the parks!'

A little while later he went up the steps of the great temple of Hazard. He met the mother of Vere coming out between the columns from the vestibule; it was sunset, she had been playing since three o'clock and had amused herself, she had won a thousand francs or so; she was going home to dinner contented and diverted. She was still staying with her friends at the villa of the Condamine. She looked like a little Dresden figure, she had a good deal of pale rose and golden brown in her dress, she had a knot of pink roses in her hand, and had above her head a large pink sunshade. Casse-une-Croûte had been playing very near her at the table, but Lady Dolly did not mind these accidents, she was not supposed to know Casse-une-Croûte by sight from any

other unrecognisable person amongst the pilgrims of pleasure.

'The ponies are waiting for you, madame,' said her son-in-law as he met her, and took her from her little attendant group of young men, and sauntered on by her side down by the marble stairs.

There was a gorgeous sunset over sea and sky, the thickets of camellias were all in gorgeous blossom, the odorous trees and shrubs filled the air with perfume, some music of Ambroise Thomas was floating on the air in sweet distant strains, throngs of gay people were passing up and down; the great glittering pile rose above them like a temple of Moorish art.

'I have won a thousand francs, *quel bonheur!*' cried Lady Dolly.

'*Quel bonheur,*' repeated Zouroff; 'I suppose that sunshade did not cost much more?'

'Not half as much,' said Lady Dolly seriously; 'these stones in the handle are only Ceylon garnets.'

Zouroff did not look at her, his face was

flushed and gloomy. He turned a little aside at the foot of the steps into one of the winding walks and motioned to a marble bench: 'Will you sit there a moment, the ponies can wait; I want to say a word to you that is better said here.'

Lady Dolly put her bouquet of roses to her lips and felt annoyed. 'When people want to speak to one, it is never to say anything agreeable,' she thought to herself, 'and he looks angry; perhaps it is because that Casse-une-Croûte was at my elbow—but I shall not say anything to Vere, I never make mischief; he must surely know that.'

'Why did you induce your daughter to marry me by false representations?' said Zouroff abruptly.

'False what?' echoed Lady Dolly vaguely.

'You deceived me and you deceived her,' said Zouroff.—Lady Dolly laughed nervously.

'Deceived! what a very low hysterical sort of word; and what nonsense!'

'You deceived her,' he repeated, 'and you cannot deny it; you told her nothing of the truth.'

'The truth?' said Lady Dolly growing very pale and with a nervous contraction at the end corners of her mouth, 'Who ever does tell the truth? I don't know anybody——'

'Of course you could not tell it her,' said Zouroff, who also had grown pale, 'but you forced her to your purpose with a lie—that was perhaps worse. You knew very well that I would not have had her driven to me so; you knew very well that I supposed her bought by ambition like any other; you did a vile thing——'

'You turned preacher!' said Lady Dolly, with a little shrill angry laugh, 'that is really too funny, and you are speaking not too politely. You sought Vere's hand, I gave it you; I really do not know——'

'But I never bid you force her to me by a lie! You never feared me—*you*—you were no more in fear of me than of a half a score of others; besides, you know very well that no man who is not a cur ever speaks——'

'I was afraid; I thought you would be furious unless she married you; when men are

angry then they speak; how could I tell? You wished that thing, you had it; you are very ungrateful, and she too.'

Lady Dolly had recovered herself; she had regained that effrontery which was her equivalent for courage; she had no conscience, and she did not see that she had done so much that was wrong. After all, what was a sin?—it was an idea. In her way she was very daring. She would kneel at the flower-services and weep at the Lenten ones, but she did not believe a word of all her prayers, and penance; they looked well, so she did them; that was all.

For the moment she had been frightened, but she was no longer frightened. What could he do, what could he say? When she could not be punished for it, guilt of any sort lay very lightly on her head. She knew that he was powerless, and she lost the fear with which the strong rough temper of Sergius Zouroff had often really moved her in an earlier time.

The contraction at the corners of her mouth still remained and quivered a little, but she

recovered all her coolness and all that petulant impudence which was perhaps the most serviceable of all her qualities.

'You are very rude,' she said, 'and you are very thankless. You are a very faithless husband, and I know everything and I say nothing, and I come and stay in your house and you ought to thank me, yes, you ought to thank me. I do not know what you mean when you say I used force with my daughter; you could see very well she detested you and yet you chose to insist, whose fault was that? You have been generous, I do not deny that, but then you are just as much so to creatures—more so! I think you have spoken to me abominably; I am not used to that sort of language, I do not like being rebuked when I have always acted for the best if the results did not repay me my sacrifices. As for your imagining I wanted so very much to marry Vere to you, I can assure you I need not have done so, I could have married her at that very same time to Jura if I had chosen.'

'To Jura?'

Zouroff looked at her, then burst into a bitter laughter that was more savage than any of his oaths.

'You are an extraordinary woman!' he said with a little short laugh.

'I don't know why you should say that,' said Lady Dolly, 'I don't know why you should say that; I am sure I am exactly like everybody else; I hate singularity, there is nothing on earth so vulgar; I do not know whatever I have done to deserve the insult of being called "extraordinary." I hate people who drive at things. I always detest conundrums and acrostics, perhaps I am too stupid for them; I would rather be stupid than extraordinary, it is less *voyant*.'

He stared down on her gloomily for awhile, while the laugh rattled in his throat with a cynical sound that hurt her nerves.

'You are a wonderful woman, Miladi, I never did you justice, I see,' he said curtly; 'Zola will want a lower deep before long, I suppose; he will do well to leave his cellars for the drawing-rooms.'

'What do you mean?' said Lady Dolly, opening innocent eyes of surprise.

Zouroff paced slowly by her side; he was silent for some moments, then he said abruptly,

'Pardon me if I do not ask you to return to my house, you and your daughter should not be sheltered by the same roof.'

Lady Dolly's pretty teeth gnawed her under lip to keep in her fury; she could not rebuke, and she dared not resent it.

'We had better not quarrel,' she said feebly, 'people would talk so terribly.'

'Of course we will not quarrel,' said her son-in-law with his cynical smile, 'whoever does quarrel in our world? Only—you understand that I mean what I say.'

'I am sure I understand nothing that you mean to-day,' said Lady Dolly, with a little feeble, flitting laugh.

Then in unbroken silence they went to where the ponies waited.

'You are too cruel to us not to return,' said Zouroff publicly, for the sake of the world's

wide-open ears, as she went to her carriage on his arm.

'I cannot stand your *mistral*,' said Lady Dolly, also for the world, and, in his ear, added with an injured sweetness, 'and I do not like reproaches, and I never deserve them.'

Lady Dolly drove home to La Condamine, where she was staying with the Marquise Pichegru, and, when she was all alone behind the ponies, shuddered a little, and turned sick, and felt for a moment as if the leaden hand of a dark guilt lay on her conscience; her nerves had been shaken, though she had kept so calm a front, so cool a smile; she had been a coward, and she had sacrificed the child of her dead husband because in her cowardice she had feared the resurrection to her hurt of her own bygone sins, but she had never thought of herself as a wicked woman. In her frothy world there is no such thing as wickedness, there is only exposure; and the dread of it, which passes for virtue.

She lived, like all women of her stamp and her epoch in an atmosphere of sugared sophisms;

she never reflected, she never admitted, that she did wrong; in her world nothing mattered much unless, indeed, it were found out, and got into the public mouth.

Shifting as the sands, shallow as the rain-pools, drifting in all danger to a lie, incapable of loyalty, insatiably curious, still as a friend and ill as a foe, kissing like Judas, denying like Peter, impure of thought, even where by physical bias or politic prudence, still pure in act, the woman of modern society is too often at once the feeblest and the foulest outcome of a false civilisation. Useless as a butterfly, corrupt as a canker, untrue to even lovers and friends because mentally incapable of comprehending what truth means, caring only for physical comfort and mental inclination, tired of living, but afraid of dying; believing some in priests, and some in physiologists, but none at all in virtue; sent to sleep by chloral, kept awake by strong waters and raw meat; bored at twenty, and exhausted at thirty, yet dying in the harness of pleasure rather than drop out of the race and live

naturally; pricking their sated senses with the spur of lust, and fancying it love; taking their passions as they take absinthe before dinner; false in everything, from the swell of their breast to the curls at their throat;—beside them the guilty and tragic figures of old, the Medea, the Clytemnæstra, the Phædra, look almost pure, seem almost noble.

When one thinks that they are the only shape of womanhood that comes hourly before so many men, one comprehends why the old Christianity which made womanhood sacred dies out day by day, and why the new Positivism, which would make her divine, can find no lasting roost.

The faith of men can only live by the purity of women, and there is both impurity and feebleness at the core of the dolls of Worth, as the canker of the red phylloxera works at the root of the vine.

But there is 'no harm' in them, that is the formula of society; there is 'no harm' in them; they have never been found out, and they are altogether unconscious of any guilt.

They believe they have a conscience as they know they have a liver, but the liver troubles them sometimes; the conscience is only a word.

Lady Dolly had been a very guilty woman, but she never thought so. Perhaps in real truth the shallow-hearted are never really guilty. 'They know not what they do' is a plea of mercy which they perchance deserve even no less than they need it.

A day or two later she made some excuse, and left the Riviera.

'After all,' she thought to herself as the train ran into the heart of the rocks, and the palm trees of Monte Carlo ceased to lift their plumes against the sky, 'after all it was quite true what I did tell her; I used to be horribly afraid of him, he can be such a brute. I never was really at ease till I saw my letters on the back of the fire; he can sulk, he can rage, he can quarrel with me if he choose, but he never can do me any harm. If he be so unpleasant about me, people will only nd say that a man always hates his

wife's mother, and I really am Vere's mother, odd as it seems; I think I look quite as young as she does; it is such a mistake, she will never paint, she puts ten years on to herself.'

Then she took the little glass out of her travelling bag, and looked at her face; it was pretty, with soft curls touching the eyebrows under a black saucer of a hat with golden-coloured feathers; she had a yellow rose at her throat, linked into her racoon fur; she was satisfied with what she saw in the mirror; when she got into her train she found a charming young man that she knew a little going the same way, and she gave him a seat in her coupé, and flirted pleasantly all the way to Lyons.

'What a mistake it is to take life *au grand sérieux*,' she thought; 'now if poor Vere were not so tragic, I think she might be the happiest woman in the world—still.'

But then Vere could not have flirted with a chance young man in a coupé, and given him a yellow rose with the whisper of a half-promised rendezvous as they parted; these are the capabilities that make happy women.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In the house on the Gulf of Saint-Hospice a heavy gloom reigned.

Life ran the same course as usual, society came and went, people laughed and talked, guests were gathered and were dispersed, but there was a shadow in the house that even the ceremonies and frivolities of daily custom could not altogether hide or dissipate. Sergius Zouroff was taciturn and quarrelsome, and it taxed all the resources of his sister's tact and wit and worldly wisdom to repair the harm and cover the constraint produced by his captious and moody discourtesies. To his wife he said nothing.

Except the conventional phrase that society in the presence of servants necessitated, Zouroff preserved an unbroken silence to her; he was gloomy but taciturn, now and then under his bent brows his eyes watched her furtively. This forbearance was only a lull in the storm, such a peace as came over the gulf beneath her windows after storm, when the waves sank for an hour at noon to rise in redoubled fury and send the breakers over the quay at sunrise. As for her, the golden cup was now full, but was full with tears.

Would she have had it empty?

She was not sure.

The echo of that one song seemed always on her ear; in the dreams of her troubled sleep she murmured its words; the singer seemed to her transfigured, as to a woman bound in martyrdom, in days of old, seemed the saint with sword and palm that rode through fiery heats and living walls of steels to release her from the stake or wheel. 'The woman in Calvados called him the Angel Raphael,' she thought with dim eyes.

It was still midwinter when Sergius Zouroff, several weeks before his usual time, abruptly left the villa of Villafranca, and went with his wife and sister to his hotel in Paris. Zouroff had taken a bitter hatred to this place where the only reproof he had ever endured, the only challenge he had ever received, had been cast at him publicly and in suchwise that he could not resent nor avenge it. When he drove through the streets of Monaco or the streets of Nice, he thought he saw on every face a laugh; when he was saluted by his numerous acquaintances he heard in the simplest greeting a sound of ridicule; when a song was hummed in the open air he fancied it was the song of the Coupe d'Or. In impatience and anger he took his household to Paris.

A great emotion, a sort of fear came upon Vere as she once more saw the walls of her house in Paris.

For in Paris was Corrèze.

To the honour and loyalty of her soul it seemed to her that she ought never to see his face or hear his voice again. She would have

been willing could she have chosen to have gone far away from all the luxuries and homage of the world, to be buried in humility and obscurity, labouring for God and man, and bearing always in her memory that song which had been raised like a sword in her defence.

When at the end of the long cold journey —long and cold, despite all that wealth could do to abridge, and luxury to rob it of its terrors —she saw the pale January light of a Paris morning shine on the 'Slave of Gerome' in her bedchamber, on the table beneath the picture was a great bouquet of roses; with the roses was a little sprig of sweetbriar.

To be in leaf in the winter she knew that the little homely cottage plant must have had the care of hothouse science. She did not need to ask who had sent her that welcome once more.

She bent her face down on the roses and her eyes were wet. Then she put them away and fell on her knees and prayed the old simple prayer—simple and homely as the sweetbriar—to be delivered from evil.

At the same time her husband, who had driven not to his own house but straight to the Faubourg St. Germain, was standing amidst the gay *chinoiseries* of the Duchesse Jeanne's famous boudoir. The Duchesse was laughing and screaming; he was looking down with bent brows.

'Oh, can you think for a moment the story is not known to all Paris!' she was crying. 'How could you—how could you —with a hundred people there to hear? My dear, it was only I who kept it out of "Figaro"! Such a lovely story as it was, and of course they made it still better. My dear, how stupid you are, blind as a bat, as a mole! To be sure we are all dying now to see the first signs of your conversion. How will you begin? Will you go to church, will you drive your mother-in-law round the lake, will you take an oath never to enter a café? Do tell me how you mean to begin your reformation? It will be the drollest thing of the year!'

'*Il vous plaît de plaisanter*,' said her visitor stiffly, between his shut teeth.

When he left the Hotel de Sonnaz, the half-formed resolution which he had made to be less unworthy of his wife had faded away; he felt galled, stung, infuriated. Casse-une-Croûte, and the other companions of his licentious hours, found him sullen, fierce, moody. When they rallied him he turned on them savagely, and made them feel that, though he had chosen to toy with them and let them stuff themselves with his gold, he was their master and their purchaser—a tyrant that it was dangerous to beard, a lion with whom it was death to play.

There was strength in his character, though it had been wasted in excesses of all kinds and in a life of utter selfishness and self-indulgence; and this strength left in him a certain manliness that even his modes of life and all his base habits could not utterly destroy; and that latent manliness made him yield a sullen respect to the courageousness and unselfishness of the woman who was his wife and his princess before the world, but in fact had been the victim of his tyrannies and the martyr of his lusts.

There were times when he would have liked to say to her, 'forgive me, and pray for me.' But his pride withheld him, and his cynical temper made him sneer at himself. He dreaded ridicule. It was the only dread that was on him. He could not endure that his world should laugh; so, uniting more display and effrontery than ever, he paraded his vices before that world, and all the while hated the panderers to them and the associates of them. He thought if he lived more decently, that the whole of Europe would make a mock of it, and say that he had been reformed by the rebukes of Corrèze. So he showed himself abroad with the *verres épais du cabaret brutal*, though they grew loathsome to him, and revenged himself on them by crushing their coarse frail worthlessness with savage harshness.

Vere could not tell the strange sort of remorse which moved him. She saw herself daily and hourly insulted, and bore it as she had done before. So long as he asked no public degradation of herself, like that which he had commanded on the Promenade des

Anglais, she was passive and content, with that joyless and mournful contentment which is merely the absence of greater evils.

Although they only met in society there was a sort of timidity in the manner of Sergius Zouroff to his wife, a gentleness and a homage in his tone when he addressed her. Vere, who shrank from him rather more than less, did not perceive it, but all others did. 'Will Zouroff end with being in love with his wife?' his friends said, with a laugh. The Duchesse Jeanne heard it said on all sides of her. 'Will he be a good husband after all?' she thought angrily; and her vanity rose in alarm like the quills of the bruised porcupine.

She attempted a jest or two with him, but they fell flat; there came an anxious sparkle in his gloomy eyes that warned her off such witticisms. She was perplexed and irritated. 'After all, it will be very diverting if you should end as *le mari amoureux?*' she could not resist saying at hazard one day. Zouroff looked down, and his face was very grave.

'Let me alone. I can be dangerous; you know that. No, I am not in love with my wife; one is not in love with marble, however beautiful the lines of it. But I respect her. It is very odd for me to feel respect for any woman. It is new to me.'

'It is a very creditable emotion,' said the Duchesse, with a little sneer. 'But it is rather a dull sentiment, is it not?'

'Perhaps,' said Zouroff, gloomily.

A sort of uneasiness and anxiety was upon him. Something of the feeling that had touched him for the child Vere at Felicité moved him once more before his wife; not passion in any way, but more nearly tenderness than it had ever been in his nature to feel for any living thing. He had always thought that he had bought her as he had bought the others, only *par le chemin de la chapelle*, and he had had a scorn for her that had spoiled and marred his thoughts of her. Now that he knew her to be the martyr of her mother's schemes, a pity that was full of honour rose up in him. After all, she was so innocent her-

self, and he had hurt her so grossly; hurt her with an injury that neither sophistry nor gold could make the less.

He was a coarse and brutal man; he had had his own will from childhood upon men and women, slaves and animals. He was cruel with the unthinking, unmeasured cruelty of long self-indulgence; but he was a gentleman in certain instincts, despite all, and the manhood in him made him feel a traitor before Vere. A kind of reverence that was almost fear came into him before her; he seemed to himself unworthy to cross the threshold of her room.

The leopard cannot change his spots, nor the Ethiopian his skin, nor could he abandon habits and vices engrained in all the fibre of his being; but he began to feel himself as unfit for his wife's young life as a murderer to touch the Eucharist. She could not imagine anything of the thoughts and the remorse that moved him. She only saw that he left her alone and ceased to vent his tyrannies upon her. She was thankful. The hours and the weeks that

passed without her seeing him were the most peaceful days of her life. When he addressed her with gentleness she was alarmed, she was more afraid of caresses than of his curses. He saw this fear in her, and a vague half sullen sadness began to enter into him. He began to understand that he owned this woman body and soul, and yet was further from her than any other creature, because no other had outraged her so deeply as he had done.

He was a man who heeded his sins not at all, and even of crime thought little. He had the absolute disbelief and the profound moral indifference of his century; but his offences against Vere he had been made to feel, and it rendered him in her presence also timid, and in her absence almost faithful. He had gathered the edelweiss and he knew that his love was only fit for the brambles and poison-berries.

The season passed away wearily to Vere; an intense pain and a vague terror were always with her. She went out into the world as usual, but it seemed to her more than ever the

most monotonous, as it was the most costly, way of destroying time. She was in her tribune at Chantilly, in her carriage in the Bois, in her diamonds at Embassies, and she received that homage which a woman of her loveliness and her position is always surrounded by, however indifferent be her mood or unwilling her ear.

But the whole life seemed to her more than ever a disease, a fever, a strained and unwholesome folly. She strove more and more to escape from it and from herself by labour amidst the poor and tenderness for them.

'You should be canonized, Vera!' said her sister-in-law to her, with a little cynical impatience; to her brother, Madame Nelaguine said with moist eyes,

'Sergius, one day you will see the red and white roses of Paradise in your wife's lap as her husband did in S. Elizabeth's.'

Zouroff was silent.

'Alas! alas! the age of miracles is past,' thought his sister. 'Good works bring their own fruits, to those capable of them, in peace of

mind and innocence of soul, that I believe; but the world has ceased to adore; the very priests have ceased to believe; the ways of sin are not death but triumph; and the poor do not love the hand that feeds them; they snatch and tear, then snarl and bite, like a street cur. Alas! alas! *où sont les neiges d'antan!*'

Meanwhile her mother Vere did not see at that time. She was thankful.

Lady Dolly was one of the five hundred leaders of English society, and could not leave her duties. She was more popular than ever before. Her balls were the prettiest of the year, and people could breathe at them; she was exclusive yet always amiable; she knew how to unite a social severity with a charming goodnature; she began to call herself old with the merriest little laugh in the world, and she began to doubt whether she still ought to dance. 'A dear little woman,' said the world; and everyone pitied her for having a daughter who was cold, who was austere, and who had so little affection for her.

'My Vere does not love me. It comes from

my own fault, no doubt, in letting her be away from me in her childhood,' said Lady Dolly softly, to her intimate friends; and her eyes were dim and her voice pathetic.

There were only two persons who did not believe in her in all her London world. These were a rough, gloomy, yet goodnatured man, who was no longer Lord Jura, but Lord Shetland; and Fuschia, Duchess of Mull.

'Guess she's all molasses,' said her Grace, who in moments of ease returned to her vernacular, 'but my word! ain't there wasps at the bottom.'

'After all, poor little Pussie is not the simpleton I thought her,' mused Lady Stoat of Stitchley, with a sigh of envy, for her own unerring wisdom and exquisite tact and prudence had not been able to avert exposure and scandal from her own daughter, who was living with a French actor in Italy, while Lord Berkhampstead was drinking himself to death on brandy.

A few days after their arrival, Corrèze had left Paris. For the first time in his life he

had refused to play in Paris on his arrival from the south, and had signed a four months' engagement with Vienna and Berlin. 'They will say you are afraid to meet Prince Zouroff,' said an old friend to him. 'They may say it if they please,' answered Corrèze, wearily, and with a movement of disdain.

He knew that his indignation and his disguise had carried him into an imprudence, an imprudence that he regretted now that the story of 'La Coupe d'Or' had flown through society, regretted it lest it should annoy or compromise her; and for her sake he would not stay where she was.

He knew how the tongues of the world wagged with or without reason at a mere whisper, and he knew that there were so many who would rejoice to see the pure, cold, snow-white purity of Vere's name fall into the mud of calumny; rejoice out of sheer wantonness, mere purposeless malice, mere love of a new sensation. 'Blessed are the pure of spirit' says the Evangelist, but society says it not with him.

He loved her; but it was an emotion no

more akin to the noble, tender, and self-denying love of other days than to the shallow sensualities of his own.

He had been satiated with intrigue, surfeited with passion; underlying the capriciousness of a popular idol, and the ardour of an amorous temper, there were the patience and the loyalty of the mountaineer's heart in him. Whosoever has truly loved the Alpine heights in early youth, keeps something of their force and something of their freshness and their chastity in his soul always. Corrèze was an artist and a man of the world; but he had been first and was still, under all else, a child of nature; and he would utterly deny that nature was the foul thing that it is now painted by those who call themselves realists. He denied that a drunkard and a prostitute are all who are real in the world.

'When the soldier dies at his post, unhonoured and unpitied, and out of sheer duty, is that unreal because it is noble?' he said one night to his companions. 'When the sister of charity hides her youth and her sex under a

grey shroud, and gives up her whole life to woe and solitude, to sickness and pain, is that unreal because it is wonderful? A man paints a spluttering candle, a greasy cloth, a mouldy cheese, a pewter can; "how real!" they cry. If he paint the spirituality of dawn, the light of the summer sea, the flame of arctic nights, of tropic woods, they are called unreal, though they exist no less than the candle and the cloth, the cheese and the can. Ruy Blas is now condemned as unreal because the lovers kill themselves; the realists forget that there are lovers still to whom that death would be possible, would be preferable, to low intrigue and yet more lowering falsehood. They can only see the mouldy cheese, they cannot see the sunrise glory. All that is heroic, all that is sublime, impersonal, or glorious, is derided as unreal. It is a dreary creed. It will make a dreary world. Is not my Venetian glass with its iridescent hues of opal as real every whit as your pot of pewter? Yet the time is coming when everyone, morally and mentally at least, will be allowed no other than

a pewter pot to drink out of, under pain of being "writ down an ass"—or worse. It is a dreary prospect.'

And he would not be content with it. There were the Ruy Blas and the Romeo in him as there are in all men who are at once imaginative and ardent. He had the lover in him of southern lands, of older days. He would watch in long hours of cold midnight merely to see her image go by him; he would go down to the cliff on the northern coast only to gather a spray of sweetbriar on the spot where he had seen her first; he would row in rough seas at dark under her villa wall in the south for the sake of watching the light in her casement; his love for her was a religion with him, simple, intense, and noble; it was an unending suffering, but it was a suffering he loved better than all his previous joys. When he saw her husband in haunts of vicious pleasure, he could have strangled him for very shame that he was not worthier of her. When he saw him beside the dusky face of the quadroon, he could have dragged him from his carriage and

hurled him under the feet of the wife he outraged.

In one of the few days before his departure he passed Sergius Zouroff on the Boulevard des Italiens. Corrèze stood still to let him speak if he would. Zouroff looked away and walked onward without any sign, except of anger, from the sudden sullen gleam in his half-shut eyes.

The arrogance of a man whose birth was higher, because his race had been greater, than the Romanoffs', made it impossible for him to imagine that Corrèze could be his enemy or his rival.

He thought the singer had only sung what had been commanded him. He thought the rebuke to him had been his wife's, and Corrèze only its mouthpiece.

Still he hated him; he avoided him; he would have liked to wring the throat of that silver-voiced nightingale.

Corrèze suffered bitterly to do nothing, to go away, to go as if he were a coward; yet he did it lest the world should speak of her—the light

and cruel world to which nothing is sacred, which makes a joke of man's dishonour and a jest of woman's pain.

He did it, and went and sang in the cities of the north with an aching heart. This is always the doom of the artist: the world has no pity. Its children must not pause to weep nor go aside to pray. They must be always in the front, always exerting all their force and all their skill before their public, or they pass from remembrance and perish. The artist, when he loves has two mistresses, each as inexorable as the other.

Corrèze could not abandon his art; would not abandon it more than a yearling child will leave its mother. It was all he had. It was a delight to him, that empire of sound which came of a perfect mastery, that consciousness and clearness of genius. Without the listening crowds, the glittering houses, the nights of triumph, he might have been only dull and lonely; but without the delight of melody, the command of that song which had gone with him all his life, as a nightingale's goes with

it till it dies, he would have been desolate.

Therefore in the keen cold of the northern winter and their tardy, niggard spring, he sang, as the nightingale sings, even while its lover lies shot under the leaves; and the multitudes and their leaders alike adored him. In Vienna the whole city saluted him as it salutes its Kaiser, and in the vast barrack of Berlin the blare of trumpets and the clash of arms were forgotten for one soft voice that sang under Gretchen's cottage-window.

'After all, when one has known this, one has known human greatness surely,' he thought wistfully, as he stood on his balcony in the keen starlight of northern skies, and saw vast throngs fill the square beneath him and all the streets around, and heard the mighty *hoch*, that northern lungs give for their emperors and their armies ring, through the frosty air for him.

Yet a mist came over his eyes that obscured the torch-glare and the gathered multitudes, and the buildings that were so white and so vast in the moonlight. He thought that he

would have given all his triumphs, all his joys —nay, his very voice itself—to undo the thing that had been done, and make the wife of Sergius Zouroff once more the child by the sweetbriar hedge on the cliff.

Though for all the world he was a magician, he had no sorcery for himself. He was but a man, like all the others, and to himself he seemed weaker than all the rest. The bonds of the world bound him—the bonds of its conventions, of its calumnies, of its common-places. He could not strike a blow for her honour that the world would not construe to her shame.

'And who knows but that if she knew that I loved her, she too might never forgive,' he thought wearily; and the flowers flung to him through the frost seemed but weeds, the multitude fools, the rejoicing city a madhouse.

When Fame stands by us all alone, she is an angel clad in light and strength; but when Love touches her she drops her sword, and fades away, ghostlike and ashamed.

His sacrifice was of little use. There

were too many women jealous of him, and envious of her, for the story of the *Coupe d'Or* not to be made the root and centre of a million falsehoods.

You may weep your eyes blind, you may shout your throat dry, you may deafen the ears of your world for half a lifetime, and you may never get a truth believed in, never have a simple fact accredited. But the lie flies like the swallow, multiplies itself like the caterpillar, is accepted everywhere, like the visits of a king; it is a royal guest for whom the gates fly open, the red carpet is unrolled, the trumpets sound, the crowds applaud.

Jeanne de Sonnaz laughed a little, shrugged her shoulders, then said very prettily that everyone knew there was nothing; Vere was a saint. And then the thing was done.

Who said it first of all no one ever knew. Who ever sees the snake-spawn, the plague-mist gather? The snake-brood grows and comes out into the light, the plague-mist spreads and slays its thousands—that is enough to see.

Who first whispered through the great

world the names of the Princess Zouroff and the singer Corrèze together? No one could have told. All in a moment it seemed as if everyone in society were murmuring, hinting, smiling, with that damnable smile with which the world always greets the approach of a foul idea.

A cruel story runs on wheels, and every hand oils the wheels as they run.

'An old love, an early love,' so they muttered; and the fans and the cigarettes made little breaks and waves in the air, as much as to say it was always so. You could say what you liked—they murmured—when people were so very cold, so very proud, so very proper; there was always some cause. An old love—ah? that was why she was so fond of music! Then society laughed; its inane cruel chirping laughter, when it smells a sin.

She had many foes. When those calm, deep, disdainful eyes had looked through the souls of others, those other souls—so often mean and shameless with paltry lusts or swollen with paltry forms of pride—had shrunk

under that glance, and hated the one who all innocently gave it; when her serene simplicity and her grave grace had made the women around her look merely dolls of the Palais Royal toyshops, and the fantastic frivolity of her epoch seem the silliest and rankest growth of an age in nothing over wise—then, and for that alone, she had become beset by enemies unseen and unsuspected, but none the less perilous for their secresy. When women had called her *farouche* in their drawing-room jargon, they had only meant that she was chaste, that she was grave, that folly did not charm her, and that she was a rebuke to themselves.

That under the snow there should be mud; that at the heart of the wildrose there should be not one worm, but many; that the edelweiss should be rotten and worthless after all—what joy! The imagined joy of angels over one who repents can never be one-thousandth part so sweet and strong as the actual joy of sinners over one purity that falls.

So she had always been a falsehood like them all! So Corrèze had always been her

lover! All the grand ladies and all the pretty ladies in the great world laughed gingerly, and tittered with that titter, which in Mary Jane and Louison one would call vulgar; and, in their nests of new knicknackery and old art, cooed together and soothed each others' ruffled plumage, and agreed that they were none of them surprised.

Meanwhile Vere knew nothing, and went on her way with calm, proud feet, unwitting that amongst the ermine of her mantle of innocence the moths of slander were at work. Who first said it? No one knew. Perhaps her mother engendered it by a sigh. Perhaps her husband's friend begot it by a smile. No one could ever tell. Only society talked. That was all. Society talked. It means as much as when in Borgia's days they said, 'To-night the Pope sups with you.'

Lady Dolly heard, as women like her hear everything. 'Are they saying this? I always thought they would say it,' she thought, and was vaguely disquieted, and yet not ill-pleased. When she had caught the first rumour of it one

afternoon, in a whisper never meant for her ears, she had gone back to her dressing-room to get ready for a dinner at an embassy, and had been good-nature itself to her maid, easily pleased with her curls, and quite indifferent as to what jewels they gave her. 'Anything looks well with white,' she had said dreamily, and her maid thought she must have got another 'affair' on the wind. But she was only feeling a sort of velvety content in the ultimate justice of things. 'She has been so cruel to me,' she thought, really, honestly thought it. 'She has always been so cold and so grave, and so very unpleasant, and always looked really as if one were no better than one should be; it would be very funny if she gets a few "nasty ones," as the boys say, herself; it really will be no more than she deserves. And, besides, people don't like that sort of manner, that sort of way she has with her eyelids, as if one were something so very bad and queer if one just happen to say the least little thing that she fancies not quite correct; nobody does like it, it is so very unsympathetic; women are sure

to pay her out if they get the least chance, and men will be quite as delighted to hear it. It is such a mistake not to make yourself pleasant, not to be like everybody else and always amiable. Such heaps of people will always take your part if you have been amiable. I wonder if it is true? No, of course it isn't true. I don't believe Corrèze ever kissed the back of her hand. But it will be very funny if she should get talked about; very sad, but so funny too!'

And Lady Dolly's mind drifted complacently and comfortably over a long series of years, in which she had skated on the very thinnest ice without ever getting a drenching, and had had all the four winds of heaven blowing 'stories' about her like a scattered pack of cards, and yet had never been the worse for any one of them. 'It is because I have always been so pleasant to them all,' thought Lady Dolly complacently, and indeed she always had been.

She had said very ill-natured things when they were safe to be said; she had laughed at nearly everybody when their backs were turned;

she had often amused herself with putting spokes in the wheels of happy marriages, of promising courtships, of social ambitions, of youthful careers; but she had done it all merely as a squirrel steals nuts, and she had always been pleasant to women; always kissed them, always caressed them, always confided, or always seemed to confide, in them, and above all had always made them think her both silly and successful, a union of the two most popular social qualities. 'Vere never would kiss any of them,' she thought, with the contempt that an old diplomatist feels for an obstinate politician who will not understand that language is given to us to conceal our thoughts; and she drew her gloves up to the elbow and took her big fan and went to her party with a complacent feeling of superiority and expectation. 'It would be very horrid, of course,' she thought, 'and of course it would be dreadful if there were any scene; and I am not very sure what the Russian laws are if it were to come to any *séparation de corps et de biens*; but still if she were to get a fright

one couldn't altogether be sorry. It would teach her that she was only made of the same stuff as other people.'

For what with the many years of separation from her daughter, and the sense of shame that perpetually haunted her for the sacrifice she had made of Vere's fair life, Lady Dolly had almost grown to hate her. She was always envying, fearing, disliking the pale, cold, beautiful woman whose diamonds outshone her own as the sun outshines the lamps; Vere was not one tithe so much her dead husband's child as she was the Princess Zouroff, and there were many times when Lady Dolly caught herself thinking of her only as the Princess Zouroff, as a social rival and a social superior, and, as such, hating her and forgetting, quite forgetting, that she had ever been a little flower-like baby that had owed life to herself. 'Vere has been so cruel to me,' she would think, 'and so very unforgiving.'

For Lady Dolly, true woman of the times, always thought that those whom she had wronged were cruel to her. Why would they

not forget? She herself could always forget.

'It shows such a bad disposition to resent and remember so long,' she would say to herself; life was too short for long memories. 'Give me the art of oblivion,' cried Themistocles; Lady Dolly had learned the art, or rather had had the power born in her, and forgot, as naturally as birds moult in autumn, her sins, her follies, her offences, and her friends.

Only one thing she never forgot, and that was a wound to her vanity—and no one ever looked at her when her daughter was nigh.

Zouroff, who did not know 'society talked,' still felt abashed before the presence of his wife; he felt as Louis of Hungary felt when he saw the celestial roses in the lap of that saintly queen to whom Madame Nelaguine compared Vere.

Since the day when her mother's name had been spoken between them, he had never seen his wife alone one moment, and never had fairly met her glance.

Yet when they were in the same room in society his eyes followed her as they had never done before, wistfully, sombrely, wonderingly. Jeanne de Sonnaz said to herself: 'He will end as *le mari amoureux*,' and so thinking spoke to him one morning early, when he was sitting in that little yellow boudoir, with all its Chinese idols, and Chinese work, which was so curiously unlike all the rest of the dark old hotel of the Renaissance, which a Duc de Sonnaz had built under Francis I. With all her cleverest tact she brought uppermost the name of Corrèze, and dropped little hints, little suggestions, harmless yet pregnant, as she leaned back in her low chair, smoking a cigarette with her cup of coffee.

Zouroff grew irritated at last, but he did not know how to express his irritation without appearing absurd in her sight, or provoking her laughter.

'My dear, you must be blind not to see that there is some sentiment between Vera and this lyric Bossuet, who made your piano his pulpit,' she continued, as he muttered some-

thing not very intelligible. 'When he refused to come to Svir you might have known. What singer without a motive refuses a mountain of roubles? Besides, he was at Ischl. I did not tell you—why should I tell you—but he serenaded her adorably, he climbed to impossible altitudes to get her flowers; he went away in the oddest, most abrupt, fashion. My dear Sergius, you are a brute, a bat, a mole——'

'Pshaw! the man is only a mime, a mime with a thrush's pipe,' said Zouroff, with rough scorn. 'Do you suppose she would descend——'

'*C'est convenu,*' interrupted Madame Jeanne; '*Oh, c'est convenu.* Your wife is the pearl of her sex, she is a second Madame Sainte Elisabeth, all the world knows that; when we see her at dinner we expect an angel to fill her glass with wine of Paradise; oh yes, you cannot suppose I mean the slightest indiscretion in her. Vera is incapable of an indiscretion, so incapable, that in a less beautiful woman such extreme goodness would make her utterly

uninteresting; but still, for that very reason she is just the sort of person to cling to an idea, to preserve a sentiment like a relic in a silver box; and I have always heard, if you have not, that Corrèze is her idea, is her relic.'

Zouroff listened gloomily; he did not as yet believe her, yet a dark sense of jealousy began to burn in him as slow matches burn; a little spark slowly creeping that in time will fire a city. It was scarcely jealousy so much as it was offence, and irritated incredulity, and masterful possession stung by idea of invasion.

But as yet he believed nothing; he smiled a little moodily.

'Your imagination runs away with you,' he said curtly. 'Vera was sixteen years old when I married her; English girls, *ma chère*, do not have affairs at that age, even if, at the same hour in France, Cupid creep behind the lexicons and missals.'

Jeanne de Sonnaz was angry in her turn. When she had been sixteen at her convent she had been very nearly causing a terrible scandal with a young lieutenant of Chasseurs, whom

her powerful family succeeded in having discreetly ordered to Africa; she had not thought that Sergius Zouroff knew aught of that silly old story.

'I did not speak of Cupid or of anything so demoralising and *démodé*,' she said carelessly. 'I know there was some story, I remember it very well, something romantic and graceful of Corrèze and your wife, when she was a girl—a very young girl; I think he saved her life, I am not sure; but I know that she thinks him a guardian angel. Pray did you know that it was his interposition that sent Noisette back to Paris that day of our fancy-fair?'

Zouroff swore a savage oath. 'What accursed interference; what insolent audacity! Are you sure?'

'Corrèze is as insolent as if he were a prince of the blood. More so, for they must please to reign but he reigns to please—himself,' said Madame Jeanne with a little laugh. 'Did yon never know that of Noisette? O how stupid men are! I guessed it and I found it out. Women always can when they choose find out

anything. Corrèze is always taking the part of knight to your wife; he kills the dragons and chases the robbers, and is always there when she wants him; did he not save her from the storm off Villafranca?'

Zouroff paced to and fro the room to the peril of the *brimborions* and *bric-à-brac*. There was a heavy frown on his brows; he remembered the storm of Villafranca only too well since it had preceded the song of the 'Golden Cup.'

'I do not believe it,' he said doggedly, for he did not.

'So much the better,' said his friend drily.

'I always notice,' she added after a little pause, 'that very cynical and sceptical people (you are very sceptical and very cynical) never do believe in a simple truth that stares them in the face. I am not saying the least harm of your wife—where is the harm? She is of an exalted temperament; she takes life like a poem, like a tragedy; she is a religious woman who really believes in sins just as our peasantry in "la Bretagne brétonnante" believe in spirits

and saints; she will never do any harm whatever. But for that very reason she shut her relic up in her silver box and worships it at home. Corrèze is always worshipped, though not always so spiritually. No one ever worships you, my dear, you are not of that order of men. Why do you look so angry? You should be thankful. It is very nice that your wife should admire a relic; she might, you know, be dragging your name across Europe at the coat tails of a dozen young dragoons, and though you could shoot them, no doubt, that is always very ridiculous. It is so impossible for husbands at any time not to look ridiculous. You must have looked very so when Corrèze was singing that song; oh, I shall regret to the last day of my life that I was not there!'

Madame Jeanne leaned back and laughed aloud, with her hands behind her head and her eyes shut.

Zouroff continued to pace to and fro the little pretty crowded chamber.

'You will break some of my idols,' she said when she had done laughing. 'I hope I have

not broken one of your idols? How could one ever suppose you cared for your wife?'

'It is not that,' said Zouroff roughly; he was shaken, disturbed, enraged; he did not know what to think, and the vanity and the arrogance that served him in the stead of pride were up in arms.

'Of course, yes; it is that,' said Madame Jeanne coolly; 'I always wondered you were so indifferent to her; she is so handsome. And I always thought that if she ever loved anyone else you would be madly in love with her once more, or rather much more than you were at first.'

Zouroff made a gesture so savage as he motioned her to silence, that even her tongue ceased for a moment its chatter.

'One must not say too much' she thought, 'or he will go and do something premature.'

'What does it matter,' she said, consolingly; 'a woman who is so much left to herself as Vera is, will be certain to find some compensation for all you deny her. You clumsy Baltic bear! you do not understand

women. Believe me it is very dangerous to marry a mere girl, a child, hurl all her illusions and all her modesties away in one month, and then leave her all alone with the reflections you have inspired and the desires you have awakened. I am no moralist, *mon ami*, as you know, but that I do say. It is true ten thousand times in ten years—and ten thousand times the result is the same. Were the Princess Zouroff to have a lover, Corrèze or any other, you could not complain. It would simply be the natural sequence of your own initiations. As it is, you must be thankful that she is Madame Sainte Elisabeth. You are not more ridiculous than the world is; mothers screen their daughters from every hint and every glimpse of impropriety, and then they marry them and think no harm can come of it. Can a bishop's blessing muzzle senses once *éveillés*, passions once let loose? Vera is faithful to you *as yet*. But if she were not, could you blame her? Can you expect a woman of her years to live the life of a nun when you have treated her as if she were a *fille de joie*?

Be reasonable. You cannot tear the skin off a peach, and then complain that it does not retain its bloom. Yet that is what you and all men do do. It is unutterably absurd. Some one will do it with my Berthe and my Claire, and I shall hate the some one; for I love my little girls. Yes, I do! While you know very well that she is——'

'You preach very eloquently!' said Zouroff, with his face flushed and his thick eyebrows drawn together.

'I preach what I know,' said his friend; 'what I have observed as I say a thousand times ten thousand times—men teach lubricity and expect chastity. It is really too ridiculous. But it is what we call the holiness of marriage. Now, will you please to go away? Paul has a "fusion" breakfast of all the parties, and I want to dress.'

'But ——'

'Go away!' said Madame Jeanne, imperiously, with a little stamp of her slipper.

Zouroff, who even to his own autocratic master was seldom obedient, took his leave,

and went. She had made his blood hot with rage, his head dull with suspicion. He threw himself into his carriage and drove through the streets of Paris in moody reflection. Uttered by a virtuous woman, the words he had heard would have made no more impression than any court sermon that he had to sit throughout and hear in an imperial chapel; but spoken by Jeanne de Sonnaz they smote him hardly.

A better emotion than was usual with her, had moved her in speaking them, a sense of justice towards the absent woman whom she had yet all the will in the world to destroy; and the bitterness of them was an unwilling witness from a *femme galante* to which he could not attach either favouritism or prejudice, and so weighed on him and smote him heavily. A rebuke even from S. John of the Golden Mouth would have left him callous and scoffing, but a condemnation from the lips of one of the companions of his sins and follies—one of the worldliest of this world—made him wince under its justice; and he knew that his sins against his wife were

heavier and grosser than even Jeanne de Sonnaz knew or guessed.

The sullen remorse that had brooded in him ever since the day on the terrace at Villafranca deepened and darkened over him. There was cruel and coarse blood in his veins, the blood of a race that through long centuries had passed their lives in passion, in tyranny, and in deeds of violence, denying no impulse, fearing no future. But there was manliness in him also, though weakened, depraved, and obscured; and this manliness made him feel a coward beside Vere.

A curious jealousy took possession of him, which was half hatred and half remorse. He felt like one of those princes who own a classic and world-renowned statue, and shut it in a cabinet, and never care to look at it, yet who being menaced with its loss, suddenly rise to fury, and feel beggared. Not because the classic marble was any joy or marvel to themselves, but because the world had envied it to them vainly, and it had made their treasure-house the desired of others. He suddenly realised

that the loss of his wife would, like that of the statue, make him poor in the eyes of Europe, and leave his palaces without their chief ornament. He did not, as yet, believe himself menaced. Like most men of vicious lives, he was never deceived as to a woman's innocence. He knew his wife to be as innocent as the little dead children she had borne in her bosom. But how long would she be so?

And if she ceased to be so, truth, by those often untrue lips of Jeanne de Sonnaz, had told him that the fault would lie at his own door, that he would reap as he had sown.

As he drove through the streets amidst the noise of Paris, he saw nothing of the glitter and the movement round him—he saw Vere in her white childish loveliness, as he had seen her on her wedding night.

That evening, when he returned to make his toilette for a great dinner at the Russian Embassy, he was gloomy, perplexed, irresolute. It was towards the close of the season; the evening was hot; the smell of the lilacs in the garden filled all the air; over where ruined

St. Cloud lay there was a mist that seemed full of rain and thunder.

For the first time for months he bade the women ask his wife if she could receive him in her room, and he entered it. Vere was standing beneath the picture of Gerôme; she was already dressed. She wore white velvet, a stuff which she preferred, and whose subtle shades of white it would have been the delight and the despair of Titian and Paul Veronese to reproduce on canvas or on panel. She wore the great Russian Order of St. Catherine. About her throat she had coils of pearls, and under these hung the medallion of the moth and the star.

Zouroff approached her with a roughness that concealed an unusual nervousness. His eyes fell on the necklace, and his anger, that was half against himself and half against her, seized on the jewel as a scapegoat.

'Who gave you that?' he said, abruptly.

She answered:

'I think I ought not to say. When you asked me long ago I did not know.'

'Your singer sent it you. Take it off.'

She hesitated a moment, then unclasped it. She believed in the old forgotten duty of obedience still.

'Give it to me.'

She gave it him.

Zouroff threw it on the ground, and set his heel on it, and stamped the delicate workmanship and the exquisite jewels out of all shape and into glittering dust.

Vere did not move a muscle. Only her face grew cold like a stone mask with unutterable scorn.

'A Princess Zouroff does not need to go to the properties of a theatre for her jewels,' he said, in a thick, hoarse voice. 'As I have treated that jewel, so I will treat the man, if ever you let him enter your presence again. You hear?'

'I hear.'

All colour had gone from her lips, but her face remained cold and calm.

'Well?' said her husband, roughly, already, in a measure, ashamed of his violence, as the

diamond star covered the carpet beneath his feet with sparkling atoms.

'What do you want me to say? I am your wife, and you can offend me in any way, and I cannot resent it. There is no use in saying what I think of that.'

He was silent, and in a measure subdued. He knew very well that his violence had been cowardly and unworthy, that he had disgraced his name and place, that he had been a coward and no gentleman. His new-born sense of fear and of veneration of her struggled with his incensed vanity and his irritated suspicions.

'Vera,' he muttered, only half-aloud. 'Before God, if you would let me, I could love you now!'

She shuddered.

'Spare me that, at least!'

He understood, and was silenced. He glanced at her longingly, sullenly, furtively. The shattered jewel lay at his feet.

'What is that singer to you?' he said, abruptly.

'A man who honours me. You do not.'

'Were he only of my rank I would insult him, and shoot him dead.'

Vere was silent.

'What do you say?' he muttered, impatient of her silence.

'He is of your rank, and he can defend himself. His hand is clean, and so also is his conscience.'

'Will you swear he is no lover of yours?'

Her eyes flashed, but she took the book of prayer lying on her table, kissed it, and said:

'I swear that, certainly.'

Then she laid the book down, and with an accent he had never heard from her, she turned suddenly on him, in a passion of indignation that transformed her coldness into fire.

'How dare you? how dare you?' she said, with a vibration in her voice that he had never heard there. 'Now that you have done me the last insult that a man can pass upon his wife, be satisfied, and go.'

Then she put her hand out, and pointed to the door.

He lingered, dazed and fascinated by that

new power in her glance, that new meaning in her voice.

'Women change like that when they love,' he said to her aloud. 'Are you not of the new school, then? You know very well you have no fidelity from me. Why should you be faithful to me? They say you need not be.'

She still seemed to him transfigured and risen above him; her fair face had the glow of holy scorn of just wrath still on it.

'Are your sins the measure of my duty?' she said, with unutterable contempt. 'Do you think if it were only for you, for *you*, that I were decent in my life and true to my obligation, I should not years ago have failed, and been the vilest thing that lives? You do not understand. Have you never heard of self-respect, of honour, and of God?'

The words touched him, and the look upon her face awed him for an instant into belief in her and belief in heaven; but against his instinct and against his faith the long habit of a brutal cynicism and a mocking doubt pre-

vailed, and the devil in him, that had so long lived with the vile and the foolish of his world, drove him to answer her with a bitter sneer.

'Your words are grand,' he said to her, 'and I believe you mean them. Yes, you do not lie. But those fine things, my princess, may last so long as a woman is untempted. But so long only. You are all Eve's daughters!'

Then he bowed and left her. He hated himself for the thing he had said, but he could not have stayed the devil in him that uttered it. If his wife betrayed him that night he knew that he would have no title to condemn her; yet he thought, as he went from her presence, if she did—if she did—he would slit the throat of her singing-bird, or of any other man, if any other it were.

Vere stood erect, a sombre disgust and revolt in her eyes. Her husband had said to her, 'thou fool! all sin alike; do thou likewise.'

In a few moments she stooped and raised the fragments of the jewels and the twisted and broken goldsmith's work. It was all shattered except the sapphire moth.

She shut the moth and all the shining brilliant dust in a secret drawer of her jewel-case, then rang for her women. In another twenty minutes she entered her carriage, and drove in silence with her husband beside her to the Rue de Grénelle.

'Le Prince et la Princesse Zouroff!' shouted the lackeys, standing in a gorgeous line down the staircase of the Embassy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was an April night when the necklace of the moth and the star perished under the heel of Zouroff; there were two months more through which the life in Paris lasted, for Zouroff adored the boulevards, even in summer months; the asphalte had a power to charm him that even the grass of his forest drives never rivalled, and the warm nights of spring and early summer found him driving down the Champs Elysées to and fro his various haunts, his carriage lamps adding two stars the more to its long river of light.

Coming home in the full daylight from his

pleasures he would at times meet his wife going out in the clear hours of the early forenoon. He asked her once roughly where she was going, and she told him, naming the poorest quarter on the other side of the Seine.

'Why do you go to such a place?' he asked her as she stood on the staircase.

'There are poor there, and great misery,' she answered him reluctantly; she did not care to speak of these things at any time.

'And what good will you do? You will be cheated and robbed, and even if you are not, you should know that political science has found that private charity is the hotbed of all idleness.'

'When political science has advanced enough to prevent poverty, it may have the right to prevent charity too,' she answered him, with a contempt that showed thought on the theme was not new to her. 'Perhaps charity—I dislike the word—may do no good; but friendship from the rich to the poor must do good; it must lessen class hatreds.'

'Are you a socialist?' said Zouroff with a

little laugh, and drew back and let her pass onward. They were the first words he had spoken to her alone since the night he had destroyed the necklace, and even now they were not unheard; for there were half a score of servants on the stairs and in the vestibule below. Vere went out to her little brougham in the fresh air of the warm lilac-scented morning as the clock struck ten.

Her husband took his way to his own set of rooms, rich with oriental stuffs and weapons, and heavy with the fumes of his tobacco. He thought of what his sister had said of S. Elisabeth and the roses of Paradise; he thought too of what Jeanne de Sonnaz had said. His wife was greatly changed.

She seemed to him to have aged ten years all suddenly; not in the fair beauty of her face, but in her regard, in her tone, in her look. Was she like the young royal saint of Hungary, or was she like all women, as he knew them? He had the careless, half-conscious, but profound belief in depravity that is the note of the century; he thought all women

coquines. That his wife was different to the rest he had believed; but that she was incapable of deceiving him he was in no way sure. Sooner or later they all went the same road, so he thought. He began to doubt that she told him the truth as to these errands of her morning hours; his sister believed in them indeed, but what should his sister know, who was never out of her bed till noon was past?

Vere had no physical fear, and at times she penetrated into the darkest and roughest quarters of Paris; the quarters that belch out those hidden multitudes that make revolution anarchy, and shatter in dust and blood the visions of patriots. But she was safe there, though once she heard one man say to another, '*Diantre*! what a sight it would be, that lovely head on a scaffold.' She turned and looked at him with a smile: 'I think I should know how to die, my friend; are you quite sure that you would?'

As this worst form of suspicion, that of the tyrant who trembles, grew upon him, he did what he knew was low and vile and beneath

him—he had her watched in these daily hours of absence. He excused his vigilance to those who had the task by the expression of his fears for her safety from the rude and ferocious classes amongst whom she went. They brought him the weekly report of all she did, minute by minute, in all its trifling details; the courage and the self-sacrifice of that thankless labour, the self-devotion and patience of that charity, were before him in a chronicle she would never have written herself. He was astonished; he was ashamed. The superstition that underlies the worldly wisdom of the aristocratic Russian, as it permeates the kindly stupidity of the Russian peasant, began to stir in him and trouble him. He began to think she was a holy creature. Though he had no faith, he had that vague religious fear, which often survives the death of all religious beliefs with those who have been educated in strict rituals, as he had been.

When June came they went to Félicité. It was the same thing every year. The world went with them. To her it seemed always as

if they were perpetually on the stage before an audience; the audience varied, but the play was always the same.

She would have given ten years of her life for a few weeks' rest, silence, solitude, with 'plain living and high thinking,' and time to watch the clouds, the showers, the woodlands, the ways of birds and beasts, the loves of the bees and the flowers. But she never had one day even to herself. There was always on her ear the murmur of society; always, like the shadow on the sun-dial, some duty that was called pleasure, obscuring each hour as it came.

It was a bright Norman summer, the weather clear and buoyant, the country a sea of apple-blossoms. Once or twice she got away by herself, and went to the little cluster of cabins on the head of the cliffs beyond Villerville. The old woman was there—always knitting, always with a white cap and a blue linen gown, against the wall of furze.

'The lark is dead,' she said, with a shake of the head. 'It was no fault of mine, my Princess; a boy with a stone one day—ah!

ah!—how shall I tell the gentleman when he comes? He has not been yet this summer; he was here in midwinter—oh, quite midwinter—and he said he was going away into the north somewhere. Jesu-Maria! the heaps of cent-sous pieces he gave me to take care of that lark!'

The shrewd old woman under the white roof of her cap watched the face of her 'Princesse.' 'I want to know if she cares too,' she thought. 'But that beautiful angel could not fail to be loved.'

Vera went away slowly through the high grove, even under the shade of the apple-blossoms. How long ago,—it seemed long as a century—since she had been the child listening, with her heart in her eyes, to the song of the lark that was dead!

Her husband said to her sharply that day, after her return, 'Where were you this morning? You were hours away.'

'I drove to Villerville,' she answered him.

'There is a shrine near there, I think?' added Mdme. Jeanne, with apparent simplicity.

The sombre thoughts of Zouroff caught her insinuation.

'I know of no remarkable shrine,' replied Vere, who did not imagine any double meaning in the words. 'There is none nearer than Val de Grâce.'

Her husband was silent. The Duchesse rose, and hummed a little song then being sung by Jane Hading: *Vous voulez vous moquer de moi.*

This year Mme. Jeanne stayed at Félicité. Why not? She had her little girls Berthe and Claire with her, and her husband came now and then, and would come for a longer time when the bouquets of pheasants would begin to fall in the drives of the park.

'*Pourquoi pas*?' she had said, when Zouroff had begged her to stay in his house, instead of taking a villa at Trouville.

'You would not last year,' he said, with a man's stupidity.

'Last year was last year,' said the Duchesse drily; and she came over and had all the south wing of the château for herself and her Berthe

and Claire and their governesses. She was really fond of her children.

The papers of that day spoke of Corrèze. He was in Stockholm.

'That is far enough; she cannot have met him,' thought the Duchesse. 'Villerville must be a pilgrimage of remembrance. There are women who can live on memories. It must be like eating nothing but ices and wafers. A *bon bouillon* and a little burgundy is better.'

Vere had given her word to her husband and her oath; she never supposed that he could doubt either. If Corrèze had come before her in that time she would have said to him with loyal firmness, 'I must not see you; my husband has forbidden me.' She was steadfast rather than impassioned; honour was the first law of life to her; that love should stoop to tread in secret ways and hide in secret places seemed to her as shameful, nay grotesque, as for a sovereign to hide in a cellar or flee in disguise. The intrigues she saw perpetually, in which her world spent its time, as the spiders theirs in weaving webs, had no

savour, no sweetness, for her. Its roots were set in treachery or cowardice—in either, or in both. All the tenderness that was in her nature Corrèze had touched; all her gratitude and all her imagination were awakened by him; she knew that the sorrow of a love that might have been sweet and happy in their lives was with them both, in sad and hopeless resignation. Yet if he had come before her now she would have said to him, 'I cannot see you, it would be disloyal.'

For the old lovely quality of loyalty, which day by day is more and more falling out from the creeds of men and women, was very strong in her; and failure in it seemed to her like 'shame, last of all evils.'

To Jeanne de Sonnaz this was very droll. So droll that it was impossible for her to believe in it. She believed in realism, in the mouldy cheese and the pewter can; she did not believe in Ruy Blas. She watched Vere narrowly, but she failed to understand her.

'How the affair drags!' she thought, with some impatience. 'Can they really be the

lovers of romance who separate themselves by a thousand leagues, and only love the more the more they are divided? It is droll.'

So she kept the snake of suspicion alive and warm in his bosom.

'You were wrong,' said Zouroff with some triumph to her; 'you were wrong. The man is in Norway and Sweden.'

'I may be,' said the Duchesse meditatively. 'But people come back from Norway and Sweden, and I never said, you will remember, that he was more to your wife than her knight, her ideal, her *souvenir*. I never meant more than that. Wait until he shall return, then you will see.'

Then he told her how he had destroyed the necklace. For years he had been in the habit of telling her such things, and he now sacrificed his wife to that habit of confidence in another woman.

'You see you were wrong' he added; 'had she borne any sentiment towards him would she have seen his jewels destroyed? She is not spiritless.'

'No, she is not spiritless,' said Madame Jeanne thoughtfully. 'No, certainly she is not that. But, in the old houses of the Faubourg, Sergius, I meet a phantom of the past that we know nothing about; a phantom that is made a deity and rules their lives like their love of Henri Cinq; a mere ghost, but still potent to omnipotence, and we know nothing about it; they call it Principle. I suppose your wife may keep that old *démodé* ghost by her too, and may be ruled by it. I have heard of such things. Oh, we have no principle, we have only convenience and impulse, and act either one or the other. But I assure you such a thing exists.'

'Scarcely in a woman,' said Zouroff with a contemptuous laugh.

'Sooner in a woman than a man, for that matter. But of course it will not last for ever. Your wife is human, and she will not pardon you that ruined locket.'

'She said nothing, or very little.'

'*Said!*' echoed Madame de Sonnaz with scorn, 'you are used to *us*, and to your crea-

tures. Do you think a woman of her temperament would scream as we, or swear as they do, would go into hysterics, or would tear your beard?'

'You seem to admire my wife,' he said with irritation.

Jeanne de Sonnaz smiled. 'You know I always did. I admire her as one admires Racine, as one admires the women of Port Royal, the paintings of Flandrin, the frescoes of Michael Angelo. It is quite unattainable, quite unintelligible to me, but I admire dumbly and without comprehension. Only I told you that you never should have married a saint, and you never should. I am sorry you destroyed her medallion. It was brutal of you, and *bourgeois*.'

'And she will remember it,' she added, after a pause, as she gathered up her silks, with which she was working an altar screen for her parish church at Ruilhières, 'be very sure of that. Vera is not a woman who forgets. I should box your ears, shake you, and laugh at it all next day, but she would

be passive and yet never forget, nor forgive. Chut! There she is!'

Vera at that moment entered the room in which Madame Jeanne was working; her husband moved with a guilty consciousness away, but she had heard nothing.

'Princesse, tell me,' said Madame de Sonnaz, 'do you forgive easily? I think not.'

'Forgive?' said Vera absently. 'Is there any question of it? It is for those who offend to ask me that.'

'Do you hear, Sergius?' said his friend with a little laugh. 'I should like to hear your *mea culpa.*'

For the first time an angry doubt came into the mind of Vera, the doubt that her husband spoke of her with Jeanne de Sonnaz. She looked at them both quickly and haughtily, then said very clearly:

'If Monsieur Zouroff know anything that he desires me to pardon he can speak for himself without an ambassadress, and without a listener. I came to ask you to allow Berthe and Claire to come out with me on the sea.'

'How good you are to those children, but you will innoculate them with your own sea phrenzy,' answered the duchesse with a little laugh. 'Of course they may go.'

Zouroff had already gone from the room, angry with his friend, more angry with his wife. Madame Jeanne rose a little impetuously, dragging to the ground the artistic embroideries of the shield she was working.

'Vera,' she said, with candour in her voice and honesty in her regard, 'do not be angry. I am so old a friend of Sergius—he has told me how he tore off your locket and destroyed it. I am so sorry; so very sorry; so is he. But, alas! men are always the same; they are all brutes we know, and—Vera—he is very jealous of your singer.'

Vera's face grew very stern.

'Has he commanded you to speak to me on his behalf?'

'No, my dear—not that; he would scarcely do that in plain words. But I am an old friend, and I am sorry. Of course it is too absurd; but he is very jealous. Be careful;

men of his race have done mad and cruel things in their time. Do not provoke him. Do not see Corrèze.'

'You mean well, madame,' said Vera in tones of ice. 'But you err in taste and wisdom, and I think your zeal outstrips your orders. I scarcely think even my husband can have charged you with his threats to me.'

'Threats? who spoke of threats? A warning——'

'A warning then, but none the less an insult. You are in my house, so I can say nothing. Were I in yours I would leave it. Your children are waiting in impatience—excuse me.'

Madame Jeanne looked after her as she went through the glass doors on to the sea-terrace, where the pretty little figures of Berthe and Claire were dancing to and fro in the sunlight. Madame Jeanne drew her tapestry-frame towards her, and proceeded to fill in the lilies of S. Cunigonde. She smiled as she bent her head over the frame.

'If I have ever known my sex,' she thought —'if I have ever known my sex, a word will go over the north sea, and Corrèze will come from his Norwegian summer to a Norman one, and then—and then—there will be droll things to see. It is like watching the curtain rise in the Ambigu—there is sure to be melodrama.'

Melodrama amused her; amused her more than comedy. She had no belief in quiet passion or quiet grief herself, no more than she had in quiet principles.

Vera went out to sea with the little children, and in the mellow sunshine and the sweet orchard-scented air her face was dark with anger and with disgust, and her heart heaved in a bitter rage and rebellion.

Her husband spoke of her to another woman—discussed her acts with another man's wife! 'Oh the coward, the coward!' she said very low between her set teeth; it was the blackest word that her language held. That he should have broken her medallion and insulted her with doubt, was insult enough for

a lifetime. But that he should relate the affront, and breathe the suspicion, to another woman seemed to her the very last baseness of life.

'If he were here!' she murmured, with a sudden newborn consciousness in her, as her eyes filled with scalding tears, and her heart heaved with indignation. For the first time an indefinite yearning rose in her to place her hand in the hand of Corrèze, and say 'avenge me!' Yet had he even stood before her then she would not have said it, she would have bidden him go and leave her.

For what Madame Jeanne called a phantom was always beside her in her path—the phantom of old-world honour, the wraith of dead heroical days.

She leaned against the rail and watched the sea run by the vessel's side, and felt the quiet slow tears of a great anguish fill her eyes and wet her cheeks.

'Do not cry: you are too pretty to cry,' said little Claire, who was a soft and tender child; and Berthe, who was older and cleverer

and harder, said, 'You should not cry; it spoils the eyes.' Then she added reflectively, '*Maman ne pleure jamais.*'

The small yacht they were in ran with the breeze through the sweet fresh air. It was a nautical toy, perfect in its way, that had been given to Vere by her husband when the estate of Félicité was settled upon her; the children had wanted to go to the Vaches Noires and search for mussels, and the little ship skirted the coast as lightly as a sea-gull, the merry little girls scudding about its deck like kittens and climbing its cordage like squirrels, while their mother—their mother who never cried—remained in the garden of Félicité with a cigar in her teeth, her person stretched full length in a low-hung silk hammock, a circle of gentlemen around her, and amidst them her host, so charmed by the dexterity of her coquetteries, and so diverted by the maliciousness of her pleasantries, that the old passion, which a dozen years before she had awakened in him, perhaps the worst, as it was in a sense the strongest and most durable, he had ever known,

revived in him sufficiently for jealousy, and held him by her side.

It was low water when they reached that part of the Vaches Noires which lies underneath what is called the desert. The strangely shaped rocks towered above, beyond, the sea was blue and smooth, the sand was wet, the children's *equille* fishing promised well. A little boat took them off the yacht to the uncovered beach, and Berthe and Claire, with naked little legs, and their forks shaped like the real fisherfolk's, and their bright hair flying, forgot that they were little aristocrats and Parisiennes and became noisy, joyous, romping, riotous children, happy in their sport and the fine weather. At that part of the rough shore there was no one near except some peasants digging for their livelihood, as the little girls were digging for play, at the silvery hermits' holes in the sands. There were fêtes at Houlgate which kept the summer crowd that day from the distant rocks. Berthe and Claire, agile as they were, were no match for the agility of the lords of the soil, and the pastime

absorbed and distracted them. Vere, seeing them so happy, left them in the care of her old skipper, who was teaching them the mysteries of the sport, and sat down under the sombre amphitheatre of the rocks.

She was fond of the children, but this day their shouts and their smiles alike jarred on her; she had learned for the first time that it was with their mother that her husband discussed her acts and thoughts. She sat quite alone in a sheltered spot, where the slate of the lower formation had been hollowed by the winter waves at high tides into a sort of niche; she thought of the day when, older in years than these little children, but younger in heart than even they were now, she had come on these shores in her old brown holland skirts. It was just such weather as it had been then; clear, cloudless, with a sunlit sea, and an atmosphere so free from mist that the whole line of the far-reaching coast, now become so familiar to her sight, was visible in all its detail, from the mouth of Seine to the mouth of Orne.

Her heart was very weary.

The distant laughter of the little children borne to her ear by the wind, jarred on her. Where were the use of honour and good faith? They smelt sweet, like a wholesome herb, in her own hand, but in all her world none set any store on them. She was free to throw them aside if she chose. She would be more popular, find more sympathy, nay, to her husband himself would seem more human and more truthful if she did so. The sense of life's carelessness, impotency for good, and frightful potency for evil, weighed on her like a stone. Her husband had said to her that women were only loyal till they were tempted; was it so? Was honour so poor a thing? she thought. In dark old Bulmer the now dead woman had taught her to think honour a sword like Britomart's, that in a maiden's hand might be as potent and as strong as in a knight's. What was the poor frail empty thing that bent at a touch and broke? She thought what they called honour must surely be no finer or better thing than a mere dread of censure, a mere subserviency to opinion; a thing without sub-

stance or soul, a mere time-service and cowardice.

A fisherman came by her with his load of mussels and little eels going on to Bougeval. He pointed up above her head and said, in his Froissart-like accent:

'There will a broken neck up yonder, unless our Lady interferes.'

Vere, alarmed for the children, who were out of sight, looked upward; she saw a man coming down the precipitous cliffs from the country above.

Her heart stood still; her blood ran cold; she recognised Corrèze.

The fisher stood staring upward; the descent was one which the people themselves would never have attempted; where the face of the dark stone was a sheer declivity, broken into sharp peaks and rough bastions, on which there seemed scarce a ledge for a sea-bird to perch on, Corrèze was descending with the sure foot that in his boyhood had let him chase the ibex and the boudequin of the Alps of Dauphiné and Savoy, and had let him in later years hunt

the steinbock of Styria and Carinthia in its highest haunts. Vere, risen to her feet, stood like the fisherman gazing upward. She was like stone herself; she neither moved nor cried out; she scarcely breathed. She looked upward, and in those few moments all the horrors of death passed over her.

Was it an instant, or an hour? she never knew. One moment he was in the air, hanging as the birds hang to the face of the cliff, beneath him only the jagged points of a thousand pinnacles of rock: the next he stood before her, having dropped lightly and easily on the sands, while the peasant gasping, muttered his paternosters in incoherent awe.

Corrèze was very pale, and his lips trembled a little; but it was not the perilous descent of the rocks that had shaken him, it was the look which he saw on her face. If he had dared; nay, had she been any other woman, he would have said, 'You cannot deny it now; you love me.'

Their eyes met as they stood together on the same coast where they had first seen one an-

other, when he was gay and without sorrow, and she was a child. They knew then that they loved each other, as they had not known it when he had sung in the Paris salon :

> Si vous saviez que je vous aime,
> Surtout si vous saviez comment—

For between them there then had been doubt, hesitation, offence, uncertainty; but now the great truth was bare to them both, and neither dreamed of denying it.

Yet he only said as he uncovered his head, 'Forgive me, Princesse; I fear I startled you.'

'You startled me,' she answered mechanically. 'Why run such a frightful danger?'

'It is none to me; the rocks are safer than the ice-walls. I was above and I saw you: there was no other way.'

The fisher had shouldered his creel and was trudging homeward; he paused abruptly, he stood before her still bareheaded, he was very pale.

Without being conscious what she did she had seated herself again on the ledge of slate,

the sea and the shore blended dizzily before her eyes.

Corrèze watched her anxiously, pitifully; his courage failed him, he was afraid of this woman whom he loved, he who had been always, in love, victorious.

'Have I displeased you?' he murmured humbly. 'I have come straight from Norway; I thought I might take one hour on this coast before going to Paris; I heard that you were here. I have been an exile many months——'

She stopped him with a gesture.

'I will not affect to misunderstand, there is no good in affectation; but do not speak so to me. I cannot hear it. I thank you for your courage at Villafranca, I am not ungrateful; but we must not see each other—unless it be in the world.'

'You did not say that at Villafranca.'

'My husband had not then said it to me.'

Corrèze moved and faltered a little, as if he had been struck a blow.

'You obey Prince Zouroff!' he exclaimed with disdain, and petulance, and passion.

'I obey the word I gave Prince Zouroff.'

Silence fell between them.

Vere was very pale; she was still seated; there was a sort of faintness on her; she had no time for thought or resolution, she only clung by instinct to one of the creeds of her childhood, the creed that a promise given was sacred.

Corrèze stood beside her checked, mortified, chafed, and humbled. He, the most eloquent, the most ardent, lover of his time, was mute and wounded, and could find no word at the instant that could speak for him. He was struck dumb, and all the vivid imagining, the fervent persuasiveness, the poetical fluency that nature had given to him and art had perfected, fled away from him as though they had never been his servants to command, and left him mute and helpless.

Vere looked away from him at the blue shining sea.

'If you think of me,' she said slowly, 'if you think of me as you thought when you sang the Coupe d'Or, you will go now.'

'With no other word?'

'My life is hard enough,' she murmured; 'do not make it harder.'

There was an unconscious appeal in the words that, from a woman so proud and so silent, touched him to the quick. All his passions longed to disobey her, but his tenderness, his chivalry, his veneration, obeyed.

'I told my husband not long ago that you honoured me,' she added in a low voice. 'Do not let me think that I deceived myself and him.'

Corrèze bent his head.

'I will never deceive you,' he said simply, 'and at any cost I will obey you.'

He looked at her once; her eyes were still gazing away from him at the sea. He lingered an instant, then he laid on her knee some forget-me-nots he had gathered in the brooks above, and left her; across the wet sands and the disordered detritus of the beach his light swift step bore him quickly to the edge of the murmuring sea. There was a boat there, an old brown rowing boat, and its owner was mending nets on its bench.

In another few moments the old boat was pushed in the water, the fisherman willingly bent to his oars—Corrèze also was rowing—with the helm set for Honfleur. When he was far away on the water he looked back, but then only: Vere sat motionless.

He had been beside her, he whom an hour earlier she had longed for as an avenger, and she had driven him away.

She had been true to the false, to the unfaithful faithful.

The man whose genius had been the one solace and pleasure of her life, whose beauty and whose sympathy and whose chivalry were as a sorcery to her, who would have put his whole fate in her hands as he had put the myosotis, had been there beside her to do with as she chose, and she had sent him from her.

Her husband had said, 'women are true till they are tempted.' She had been tempted and had been strong, strong enough not even to say to him, 'Avenge me.'

The sun had sunk low, the late day grew grey, the dusky sea ran swiftly and smoothly,

soon the terraces and towers of Félicité rose in sight through the twilight mists. The little children, tired and sleeping, lay curled quietly on their cushions at her feet: she felt weak and weary as if from some long combat, and her heart ached—ached for the pain she caused, the pain she bore. She stretched her hand over the rails and dropped the forget-me-nots in the fast running sea.

She would not keep a flower of his now that she knew——

She saw the blue blossoms tossed for a moment on the water and then engulfed. 'I do not want them,' she thought, 'I shall never forget; it will be he who will forget.'

For she thought so, with that humility of a lonely soul which is deemed so proud only because it is so sad.

He would go into the world, be the world's idol, and forget. But she would remember till she died. And even at this consciousness a sense of guilt came over her, a sense of shame burned in her. She loved this man who was not her husband—she, a wife. To her conscience

and her honour, both unworn and undulled, even so much as this seemed a treachery to her word and an uncleanliness. 'Do I grow like the others?' she mused, with a sort of horror at herself; the others, the women of her world, who made intrigues their daily bread. 'O my angel Raphael, you shall not fall nor I!' she murmured, half aloud, as the sea swept on its foam the little blue blossoms, and her eyes grew blind and her heart grew faint.

Fall into the slough of abandoned passions, into the dishonesty of hidden loves, into the common coarse cowardice of an impure secresy? ah never, never! She felt cold, sick, weary, as she left the little road under the shadow of the walls of Félicité, and ascended the stone steps that mounted from the sea to the garden. But she moved firmly and with her head erect.

Honour is an old-world thing; but it smells sweet to those in whose hand it is strong.

It was nearly nine; the shadows were dark, a low pale yellow line where the sun had gone down was all that was left of day. The little girls, sound asleep, were carried away from the

boat by their women. The first gong was sounding that summoned the guests of the house to dinner. She was dressed quickly, and went down to the drawingrooms; there was a shade like a bruise under her eyes, and her lips were pale; otherwise she looked as usual.

Jeanne de Sonnaz, greeting her with effusion, kissed her and thanked her for the children's happy day.

Vere sat opposite her husband through the dinner, which was always a banquet. Her eyes were tired, but there was a steady light in them; something heroic and invincible, that made the grave beauty of her face like that of a young warrior's. No one saw it. They only thought that she was tired, and so more silent than usual.

The evening wore on its way; to her it seemed endless; there were many people staying in the house; it was such an evening as the first that she passed at Félicité, when she had watched society with wondering gaze, as a bright comedy. Jeanne de Sonnaz, with a

dress of red and gold, and some of her grand rubies on, sparkled like a jewel, till her ugly face seemed radiant and handsome. She sang songs of Theo and of Judic; she played impromptu a scene of Celine Chaumont's; she was brilliant and various as her manner was, and she sent a shower of mirth on the air that was to others as contagious as a laughing gas. 'What a pity she tires herself so much by the sea or on it,' she said of Vere to Sergius Zouroff. 'It makes her so silent and so *morne* in the evening.'

He muttered something like a suppressed oath, and went to his wife.

'You look like a statue; you leave others to do all your duties for you; you sweep through the rooms like a ghost. Why cannot you rouse yourself, and laugh and dance?'

Vere made him no answer.

Laugh and dance in public, and in stealth betray him? To do that would have made him content, herself popular.

The night wore itself away in time; she never well knew how; it closed somewhat

earlier than usual, for the morrow was the first day of shooting, and Madame Jeanne had bade them rise with the lark. Vere, instead of going to her room, went out into the gardens. The night was cool, fragrant, soundless, except for the murmur of the sea.

'To laugh and wear a false or a foolish face —that is all he asks of me!' she thought bitterly. If her husband could have seen her heart as it ached that night, if he could have known that only out of loyalty to him she had cast the myosotis from her hand into the sea, would he not only have told her she was an imbecile, and was too fond of tragedy, and he was no Othello to be jealous of a humble handkerchief!

Would he not have said, 'Look around, and do like others.'

It was between one and two o'clock; the stars were all at their brightest, except where clouds hung over the sea to the north and obscured them; the château was quiet behind her; an irregular yet picturesque pile that grew sombre and fantastic in the shadows,

while in its casements a few lights only gleamed here and there through the ivy.

Vere stood and looked at the waves of the channel without seeing them. The world seemed empty and silent. Never again would she hear the voice that had first come to her ear on those shores—never again—except in some crowded salon or across some public theatre.

She shuddered, and went within. The silence and the solitude were too like her destiny not to hurt her more than even the 'vain laughter of fools.' It was the first time that the peace of nature and of night seemed a reproach to her. For though innocent of any act unworthy or disloyal to herself, she felt guilty, she felt as if some poison had fallen in that golden cup which she strove to keep pure. To her a thought, a desire, a regret, were forbidden things, since she was the wife of Sergius Zouroff.

One glass door was open, and some lamps were burning, for the servants had seen that she remained on the terrace, and two or three

of them, yawning and sleepy, stood in the antechambers awaiting her entrance.

She went up the staircase, past those bronze negroes, with their golden torches, which had lighted her childish steps on her first night at Félicité.

There were two ways to her own chamber. One way, the usual and shortest one, was encumbered by some pictures and statues that were being moved to another corridor. She took the longer way, which led through the body of the house to the left wing of it, in which her own rooms were, by her choice, for sake of the view down the sea-coast and northward.

Going this way she passed the stately guest-chambers which had been allotted to the Duchesse de Sonnaz.

The lamps in the long gallery burned low; her footfall made no sound on the carpet; she passed on as silently as the ghost to which her husband impatiently likened her. She was thinking neither of him nor of her guests; she was thinking how long her life in all likelihood

would be since she was young, and how lonely. She was thinking, 'he bade me keep myself unspotted from the world; it shall never be he who lowers me.'

Suddenly a strong ray of light shone across her feet. She was passing a half-opened door —a door that had been shut with a careless hand; and had re-opened. The curtains within were parted a little; as she passed, she could not tell why, her eyes were drawn to the mellow light shining between the tapestries.

It was the door of Jeanne de Sonnaz. Through the space Vera saw into the room, and saw her husband.

For a moment she made a step forward to enter and front them. The blood leaped into her face; all the pride in her, outraged and disgusted, sprang up in arms under that last and worst of insults. Then with a strong effort she thrust the door to, that others should not see what she had seen; that she should screen his dishonour, if he would not; and passed on unseen and unheard by those within to her own

room. When she reached it she trembled from head to foot, but it was with rage.

She came of a bold race, who had never lightly brooked insult, though she had long borne its burden patiently, because duty was stronger with her than pride. She sat down and drew paper and pens to her, and wrote three lines:

'Either I or the Duchesse de Sonnaz leave Félicité to-morrow before noon.

(Signed) 'VERA, Princess ZOUROFF.'

She sealed the note, and gave it to her woman for the Prince.

'You will give it to Ivan; he will give it to his master in the morning,' she said, as they were leaving the room. She was still careful of his dignity, as he was not. That night she did not sleep.

At sunrise they brought her a letter from her husband. It said only, 'Do what you please. You cannot suppose I shall insult my friend for you.—ZOUROFF.'

'His friend!' said Vere with a bitter

smile. She recalled memories of her life in Paris and at Svir; recalled so many hints, so many glances, so many things that she nad attached no meaning to, which now were quite clear as day. She remembered the warning of Corrèze.

'He too must have known!' she thought; and her face burned to think that the man who loved her should be aware of all the outrage passed on her by the man who owned her.

'The Prince asks an answer,' they said, at her door.

'There is no answer,' said Vere, and added, to her women, 'bring me a little tea, and then leave me.'

They thought she wished to sleep, and suspected nothing else. Left to herself she gathered up some needful things with her own hands, the first thing she had ever done for herself since the old simple days at Bulmer. She put together the jewels her own family had given her; shut the shattered necklace of the moth and the star up with them in a casket, and put on the plainest clothes she

had. She was ready to leave his house now and for ever. She would take nothing with her that was his or that had been hers by his gift. Of the future she had no clear thought; all that she was resolute was, that no other night should find herself and Jeanne de Sonnaz under the same roof.

All the house was quiet. No one had risen except herself. She waited, because she did not choose to go out like one in hiding, or ashamed, from her own home. She intended to leave the place in full daylight and publicity. The world could say what it liked, but it could not then say she had left secretly, and the shame would be for those who merited it. Without and within all was still. The sea had scarce a sound, no breeze stirred in the trees, the silvery haze that heralded a hot day was over land and water. She stood at the window and looked out, and a quiet tranquillity came over her. She was about to leave it all for ever, all the pomp and the splendour, all the monotony and the feverishness, all the burden of rank and the weariness of pleasure.

She would soon be alone, and poor. She was not afraid. She would go into the dim, green German country, and live in some man-forgotten place, and get her bread in some way. She was not afraid. Only all the world should know where she went, and why. All the world should know she was alone.

She stood beside the open casement with the dog beside her; he would be her sole companion in the loneliness to which she would go. Corrèze—she thought of Corrèze, but, with the sternness which is apt to exist in very pure and very proud natures, she thought only 'if he come to me when I live alone he too will be a coward!'

And as a coward she would treat him, she thought; for her heart was but half awake still, and of passion she yet knew but little, and what she knew she feared as a thing unclean.

Suddenly her door was burst open; her husband entered; his eyes were bloodshot, his face was dark with fury.

'Are you mad?' he cried to her, as he saw

her travelling jewel-case and the locked valise, and casket.

She looked at him with a grand dignity upon her face, as though she saw something leprous and loathsome.

'I gave you your choice,' she said in a voice that vibrated with restrained wrath. 'You took your choice.'

She pointed to his letter that lay open on the table.

'And I tell you that neither you nor she shall go out of my house!' he swore with a great oath. 'You shall receive her, smile on her, sit at the same table with her, please her in all things as I do. She is the only woman that I never tire of, the only woman that contents me——'

'Tell Paul de Sonnaz so; not me.'

Her husband's face grew terrible and hideous in the convulsions of its rage.

'He! he is not a fool like you, he knows what the world is and women are. By Christ, how dare you?—how dare you speak to me of him or her? I am my own master, and I am

yours. Sooner than let you insult my friends for one moment, I would fling you from this window in the sea.'

'I know that. It is I who go, she who remains.'

'As God lives, neither of you shall go. What! you think I shall allow such a scandal as my wife's departure from under my roof?——'

'I shall not allow such an outrage as for Madame de Sonnaz to be under your roof with me.'

She spoke firmly and in a low tone and without violence. Something in her tone from its very calmness subdued and abashed him for an instant: but his hesitation scarcely lasted more than that. 'Madame de Sonnaz is my guest—my honoured guest,' he said passionately. 'I will not have her affronted. I will not have a breath on her name. What, you will make a scene that will ring through all Europe—you will go out of my house when my friends are in it—you will make yourself and her and me the bye-words of society!

Never, by heaven! You are my wife, and as my wife you stay.'

Vere, who was very pale and as cold as though the summer morning were a winter's day, remained quite calm. By great effort she restrained her bitter rage, her boundless scorn. But he changed her resolve in nothing. 'I stay, if Madame de Sonnaz go,' she said between her teeth. 'If she stay, I go. I told you to choose; you did choose.'

Sergius Zouroff forgot that he was a gentleman, and all that was of manliness in him perished in his frenzy. He raised his arm and struck her. She staggered and fell against the marble of the console by which she stood, but no cry escaped her; she recovered herself and stood erect, a little stunned, but with no fear upon her face.

'You have all your rights now,' he cried brutally, with a rough laugh that covered his shame at his own act. 'You can divorce me, Madame, "*sous le toit conjugal*," and "*violence personelle*," and all the rest; you have all your rights. The law will be with you.'

'I shall not divorce you,' said Vere, while the great pain of the blow, which had fallen on her breast, ached and throbbed through all her body. 'I shall not divorce you, I do not take my wrongs into the shame of public courts; but—I go—or—she goes.'

An exceeding faintness came over her, and she was forced to sit down lest she should fall again, and the air around her grew dark and seemed full of noise. Zouroff rang loudly for her woman.

'The Princess fell against the marble—an accident—she has fainted,' he said hurriedly, and he escaped from the chamber. In a few moments he was with Jeanne de Sonnaz. In the utter weakness of his submission to the domination which she had obtained over him he had grown so used to seek her counsels in all things, and at all times, that he told her all now. Her rage extinguished his own as one fire swallows up another.

'Oh, imbecile!' she screamed at him. 'If Paul hear—if the world know—I am lost for ever!'

He stared at her with gloomy amaze.

'Paul knows; society too—they always have known——'

'O madman!' she yelled at him, with her shining eyes all flame. 'They have known certainly, but they could still seem *not* to know, and did so. Now if once it be a public scandal Paul will act, and the world will be with him! Good God! If your wife leave the house for me, I am ruined for ever!'

'I have given her what will keep her still.'

'You are a brute, you were always a brute. That is nothing new. But your wife you do not know. She will get up though she be dying, and go—now she once knows, now she has once said that she will not stay where I am. Wait, wait, wait! you imbecile! Let me think; your wife must not go. For her sake? no! good heavens no!—for *mine*.'

Sergius Zouroff stood passive and uncomplaining under the torrent of her abuse.

'A scandal, a story for the papers, a cause for the tribunals; good heavens! have you and I lived all these years only to fall into such

helpless folly at the last?' she shrieked at him. 'Why did you have me come here? Paul will take Berthe and Claire away, if he do no more. Oh you madman! why did you not show me your wife's note before you went to her? She is right, she is always right, and you were a brute to strike her; but she wants her divorce, of course, why not? she loves Corrèze, and she is a woman afraid of sin. But she shall not go —she must not go; I will go sooner——'

'You shall never go for her.'

'I shall go for myself. You are a brute, you are an idiot; you understand nothing. I will be summoned—Paul can be ill, or Ruilhières on fire—something, anything, so that no one knows.'

'You shall not go, you will humiliate me; she will think ——'

'What do I care for your humiliation? I care to avert my own. Pshaw! Do you suppose I would stay an hour in this house if your wife were out of it? Do you suppose I would risk my good name, and make myself a scandal to the Faubourg? Good heavens! how

little you know me after all these years. I shall obey your wife and go; she is the soul of honour in her own odd way. She will say nothing if I go. My name shall not serve her as a chisel to cut her fetters. Oh, what fools men are, what dolts, what mules! Why could you not bring her note to me, and ask me what to do? Instead, you must go and strike her! Do you suppose her women will not know? An accident! Who believes in accidents? All the house will know it before noon. Oh imbecile! You would marry a young saint, a creature from another world—it was sure to end like this. Go, go! or my women will see you, and it will be worse; go, and in a minute or two I shall send you word that Paul is dying. Go! Thank you? I?—no, why should I thank you? I never bade you be cruel to your wife or strike her; I always bade you treat her as a saint. She is one, though how long——'

'I struck her because she insulted you.'

'She was right enough to insult me; she is more right still when she insults you. Now go!'

With sullen subjection he went; he learned what gratitude was from the women of his world. In half an hour's time there was some confusion in the well-ordered household of Felicité, for the Duchesse de Sonnaz, her children, their servants and her own, were departing in hot haste; it was said that M. le Duc was lying ill of sunstroke at their château of Ruilhières, in the department of Morbihan.

Lying sick and blind on her bed, Vere heard the sound of the horses' feet.

'It is Madame la Duchesse who is leaving,' said her maid, who from the other side of the closed door had heard all that had passed between Sergius Zouroff and his wife.

Vere said nothing.

It was the first day of shooting; there was a great breakfast, to which many sportsmen of the neighbourhood came; there were battues on a large scale in the woods; there were noise and movement and the sound of many steps throughout the château, and out on the terrace, under her windows; now and then she heard her husband's voice; then after a while all was

still; there was the echo of distant shots from the woods, that was all. The day wore away. Her women told the ladies of the house party that the Princess had a severe headache from a fall.

Towards evening she rose, and was dressed. The pain had lulled in a measure, and the faintness had passed away. She wished to avoid comment, to cover the departure of Jeanne de Sonnaz. Under the pale yellow roses of the bouquet at her bosom there was a broad black bruise. The evening passed as usual. The house party suspected nothing; Vere's women were discreet, and the surprise, the sorrow, the bewilderment of Jeanne de Sonnaz at what she had said were the sudden tidings from Ruilhières had been so natural, that the few people who had seen her at her departure had been deceived into believing those tidings true. The evening passed smoothly; a little operetta in the little theatre filled two of its hours, and if the mistress of Félicité looked pale and spoke little, she often did that. Zouroff never looked at his wife and never ad-

dressed her. But that also was not rare enough to be any matter for notice.

Vere underwent the fatigue of the night without faltering, though she was in physical pain, and at times a sickly sense of faintness came over her.

She was thankful when the men went to the smoking-room, the women to their bed-chambers, and she was free to be alone and rest. On the table in her own room there lay a letter. She shuddered a little, for she recognised the loose, rude handwriting of her husband. She was tired of pain and of insult, and she had little hope of any other thing.

She sat down and read it.

'You have had your own way,' he wrote to her. 'The only woman whom I care for has been driven away by you. Do not suppose you have gained any victory; you will pay the cost of the affront you have dared to pass on her. I shall not speak to you again if we meet here a thousand times. I wish to avoid scandal for the present at least, not for your sake,

but for hers. So I write to you now. You were about to leave this house. You will leave it. As soon as this circle of guests breaks up, the day after to-morrow, you will leave it. You will go to an estate of mine in Poland, Walrien and Ivan will accompany you, and you can take your women of course. There you will remain. If you wish to escape, you can sue me for a divorce. Whenever you do so, I shall not oppose it.

(Signed)

'SERGIUS NICOLAIVITCH, Prince ZOUROFF.'

CHAPTER XXV.

In one of the most desolate parts of the country of Poland, there were vast estates of the Princes Zouroff, conferred on them at the time of the partition of that unhappy land between Christian sovereigns. They were vast, lonely districts, with villages few and scantily populated; immense plains of grain and grass, and swamps of reedy wildernesses, and dim, sandy forests of pines, straight, and colourless, and mournful.

In the heart of all these—whose yield made up no slight sum in the immense riches of the Russian Princes who owned, and spent their produce on the pavement of Paris and St.

Petersburg—there stood a large, lofty building, which had been once a fortified monastery, and had served for a century as the scarcely ever visited castle of the Zouroffs.

It was of immense extent. It had no architectural beauty; and, from its many narrow windows there was no outlook except on one side to the interminable woods of pine, and on the other over the plains and marshes, through which a sullen, yellow river crept. Within, it was decorated as it had been decorated by Ivan Zouroff at the time of the abdication of Stanilas Augustus; Zouroff having hanged the peasants on the pine trees, and made the corn-lands red, before sunset and harvest-time, with blood, and in such wise pleased his imperial mistress.

From the gay, gorgeous interior, and the sunlit gardens and sea terraces of the Norman château, Sergius Zouroff sent his wife to this place, amidst the desolation of a province, then bleeding afresh from the terrorism that strove to stamp out the Nihilists.

Vere left Félicité without protest. Félicité

was hers by settlement, but she did not urge that fact. She accepted the commands of her husband, and travelled across Europe in almost unbroken silence, accompanied by the attendants he had selected, by her women, and by the dog Loris.

When she had read her husband's letter, her first impulse had been to refuse, and to disobey him; to go away with her own jewels, and no single thing of his, and gain her own bread in some way in solitude, as she had intended to do if Jeanne de Sonnaz had remained in her house. Then, on later and calmer thought, she accepted the banishment to Poland. Her pride made her willing to avoid all scandal, her principle made her deem it still right to obey her husband. She had asked him once to let her live on his estates, out of the world; she considered she had the request granted, though in a savage and bitter way. As to the condition that he made her return dependent on—she lifted her head, and drew herself erect, with the haughty resolve that she was capable of when stung and roused. Sooner

than receive Jeanne de Sonnaz in her house, or ever salute her as a friend, she said to herself that she would live and die on the Polish plains. She did not answer; she did not protest or rebuke; she neither wrote nor spoke to her husband in the fortnight that followed; she entertained her guests with her usual calm, cold grace, and when the last of them had left, and the day of her departure arrived, she went away tranquilly, as though she went of her own will, and in her own way, taking the dog Loris.

Zouroff had not been surprised.

Though he could ill appreciate her character, he did not misunderstand it. 'She may break, she will never bend,' he thought, as careful always of the outside observances of courtesy, he bade her a courtly farewell before his household.

'I am his prisoner!' she thought, as a week later she entered the austere gloom of Szarisla. But sooner than release herself on the terms he offered, she said in her heart that Poland should be her tomb, as it had been that of so many martyrs. Martyrs to an

idea, the world said of those. It would have said the same of her.

To her mother, and her friends, and all society, Sergius Zouroff explained that his wife had long asked him to allow her to pass some months on his northern estates, to establish a school, and improve the moral condition of the peasantry, and at last he had consented; it was an insanity, he added, but an innocent one; she was a saint.

'Alas! alas! what has happened?' thought his sister, 'what has happened? Oh, why was I not at Félicité!'

But she was the only one who feared or wondered—the Princess Vera had always been so strange; and she was a saint.

To Jeanne de Sonnaz alone Zouroff said, with his gloomy eyes full of sombre ferocity, '*Je vous venge.*'

To her sister-in-law, and to the few to whom she ever wrote, Vere said always, in her brief letters, 'I am tired of the world, as you know; I am glad of this retreat. It is desolate, and very dull, but it is peace.'

Madame Nelaguine, with her eyes sparkling with rage, and all her little person erect in indignant dignity, reproached her brother in a torrent of rebuke and censure. 'I imagine very well what happened,' she said to him. 'You would have Jeanne de Sonnaz under the same roof with Vere.'

'Respect my friend's name,' said Zouroff, with savage authority, 'or you and I never meet again. Vere is a saint, you say. Well, she has her wish; she goes into retreat. Would it please you better if she were living with Corrèze?'

'Corrèze—he is nothing to her!' said Madame Nelaguine hotly.

Zouroff shrugged his shoulders. 'Some think otherwise,' he answered.

'You are a brute, and you are a coward—a malignant coward!' said his sister. 'You outrage your wife in every way, and you must even dare to soil her innocence with suspicion.'

'If it be suspicion only time will show,' said Zouroff. 'Go and live at Szarisla yourself, if you pity my wife so much.'

But Madame Nelaguine, who loved the world, and could not live without its excitements and its intrigues, could not face that captivity in the Polish plain, though all the heart she had in her yearned towards her brother's wife.

'Will you imprison her all her life?' she cried.

Zouroff answered with impatience and fatigue, 'She will remain there until she receives my friend with respect.'

'You are a brute,' said his sister once more.

'I protect Jeanne, and I avenge her,' said Zouroff obstinately. He fancied that his honour was involved in this defence of his mistress.

'Jeanne!' echoed his sister with unutterable scorn. 'You might as well defend and avenge your quadroon.'

But she knew very well that she might as well seek to shake the Ural mountains at their base as change the obstinacy of her brother.

Jeanne de Sonnaz had gained the empire over him of a re-awakened passion; the empire of a

strong woman over an indolent man; of a mistress once deserted, and so doubly tenacious of her hold. There was no beauty in her, and no youth; but she had the secret of dominion over men. She cowed this tyrant, she subdued this man, who, to the self-will of long self-indulgence, had the moral feebleness and inertness of the Slav temperament; she railed at him, jeered at him, commanded him, yet fascinated him. He knew her to be worthless, faithless, never wholly his, nor wholly any one's, yet she held him. 'After all, she is the woman I have loved best,' he said to himself; and believed it, because she had the gift of exciting all that was worst in him, and subduing his fierce impulses to her own will and whim.

When he had married, Jeanne de Sonnaz, who beyond all things valued her position, and loved the world, had kept her peace because she did not choose to jeopardise her name, or gain the ridicule of her society. But she had always said to herself, '*Je me vengerai.*'

She kept her word.

Vere was in her captivity at Szarisla; and the Duchesse de Sonnaz—moving from one château to another, and entertaining circles of guests for the shooting at their own mighty place of Ruilhières—said easily in the ear of the two or three great ladies who were her most intimate associates, that there had been a scene at Félicité; she had tried to mediate between her old friend and his wife, but vainly, so far as peace went; Zouroff had forbidden the princess to receive Corrèze, and Corrèze had been found there at evening in the gardens; oh, there was nothing serious—Vera was a young saint—but all the same there had been a scene, and Zouroff had sent his wife to Szarisla.

Then the two or three whom she told told others, and so the tale ran, and grew as it ran, and was believed. The world was satisfied that the Princess Zouroff was in penitence in Poland.

'I think they were lovers many years ago. I remember, when she was a mere child, seeing her in a boat with Corrèze; she had come

from Havre with him; her mother was distracted. I suppose Zouroff and the Nelaguine knew nothing of it,' said the Princesse Hélène Olgarousky, who made one of the brilliant autumn party at Ruilhières where Zouroff was not.

'Be sensible, *mon ami*,' had said the Duchesse Jeanne; 'now your wife is away I cannot receive you—it would not do. Oh, in winter, when we are all in Paris again, you may come and see Paul as usual. But stay at Ruilhières you will not; no—no—no. Three times, No!'

She had no beauty, and no youth, she had no heart, and no conscience; she had been his friend for fifteen years, and he usually tired of any woman in less than fifteen days. Yet Sergius Zouroff chafed at the interdiction to stay at Ruilhières, as though he were eighteen, and she seen but an hour before; and found himself waiting with impatience for the moment of his return to Paris, with a vague sense that without this woman life was stupid, empty, and purposeless.

He missed the goad to his senses and his temper with which she knew so well how to guide him, as the tamed elephant turned loose misses the prick of the mahout's steel. But she, who knew that the elephant too long left to himself turns wild, and comes never again to his mahout's call, took care not to leave Zouroff too much to himself. When the first shooting-party broke up at Ruilhières, she left Duc Paul with some men to slay the pheasants, and went, for the sake of little Claire, who was not strong, to Arcachon and to Biarritz.

There Zouroff went occasionally when she would allow him. He went alone. He would no more have dared to take the mulattress or any other newer toy within sight of Jeanne de Sonnaz now, than he would have dared to take them into his Czarina's presence.

He had insulted his wife, but he dared not insult his mistress. She spoke to him often of his wife.

'You cannot keep Vera in Poland all winter,' she said one day in the fragrant

alleys of Arcachon while Berthe and Claire played before them with little silk balloons.

'I shall do so,' he said gloomily.

'Impossible! They will call you a tyrant, an ogre, a fiend. You must have her in Paris.'

'Not unless she receives you.'

'Do not make me ridiculous, I beg of you,' she said with some impatience. 'You mean, —if she will consent not to receive Corrèze.'

Zouroff was silent. He knew that he did not mean that. But it was the fiction which his ruler had set up between them.

'That is why you have sent her to Szarisla,' continued Jeanne de Sonnaz. 'All the world knows that, though of course we put a fair face on it. The idea of talking of her not receiving me. If she did not receive me, Paul would have to shoot you, which would have its inconveniences—for you and Paul.'

She laughed a little, and impaled a blue butterfly on the sharp point of her tortoiseshell cone. Zouroff still said nothing; a sort of vague remorse touched him for a moment, as little Claire, whose balloon was entangled in a

shrub, cried out, 'Where is the princess? Why is she never with us now? She would get down my balloon. You are too cross.'

Zouroff released the toy, and said roughly, 'Run to your sister, Claire, you tease us.'

'Madame Vera never said I teased,' said the child sullenly, with a pout, as she obeyed, and joined her elder sister.

'Where is Corrèze?' said her mother.

'*Nom empesté!*' swore Zouroff, 'how should I know where a singer may be?'

'It is very easy to know where a great singer is. Comets are watched and chronicled. He was shooting in Styria, at Prince Hohenlohe's, last month. Why do you not know? Do you have no reports from Szarisla?'

'He is not there,' said Zouroff angrily. He hated his wife, but he was jealous of her honour, even though it would, in a sense, have gratified him to be able to say to her, 'You are no higher than the rest.'

'He may not be there,' said the Duchesse de Sonnaz carelessly. 'On the other hand, it is not very far from Styria to Poland, and he

is singing nowhere in public this autumn. Are your reports to be trusted?'

'Ivan would tell me anything,' said Zouroff moodily. 'He writes me weekly of her health; he says nothing happens; no one goes——'

'Ivan is incorruptible, no doubt,' said Jeanne de Sonnaz, a little drily.

'What do you mean?'

'You are always asking me what I mean? I am no Sphinx, my dear friend, I am very transparent. I mean, that since your wife is there, it seems to me improbable that she does not, or will not, see Corrèze——'

Zouroff ground his heel on the turf with impatience, but he kept silent.

'I think it would be worth your while to make sure that she does not see Corrèze. I am quite aware that if they do meet, it will be merely a knight meeting a saint,—

> Pauvres couples, à l'âme haute,
> Qu'une noble horreur de la faute
> Empêche seule d'être heureux.

and that he will—

Baise sa main sans la presser :
Comme un lis facile à blesser
Qui tremble à la moindre secousse——

and all the rest. But still—if only as a moral phenomenon, it might be worth watching, and Ivan, on whom you depend, is, though a very superior servant, still only a servant.'

'What would you have me do? Go myself?'

'Yes, I think you should go yourself. It would prevent people saying unpleasant things or untrue ones. You must have your wife back in Paris, or you must be very certain of all that passes at Szarisla, or you may be made to play a foolish part—a part you would not like to play, when you have shut your wife up in it for her safety.'

'Jeanne,' said Zouroff gloomily, with his eyes fixed on the turf they were treading. 'There is no one to hear, and we may speak as we mean; Vera does not return to me until she consents to receive you; there is no question of her honour; she will have that intact as if she were in a convent; she is made like

that; she is no "*lis facile à blesser,*" she is made of steel. She knows everything, and she will no longer know you. To protect your name I exile her. She may live and die in Poland.'

She heard him, knowing very well that he said the simple fact, yet her eyes grew angry, and her teeth shut tight.

'You are all imbeciles, you Russians,' she said contemptuously. 'You have only one remedy for all diseases—Siberia! It does not cure all diseases; Nihilism shows that. Corrèze is your best friend, since you want to be free.'

'If he set foot in Szarisla he shall be beaten with rods!'

Jeanne de Sonnaz, as they passed under the tamarisk trees, looked at him coldly, and crossed her hands lightly on her gold-headed cane as she leaned on it.

'On my word I do not understand you. Are you in love with your wife?'

'Jeanne!'

'I do not accept divided homage,' said his friend with close-shut teeth; 'and jealousy is a form of homage. Perhaps the truer form.'

'One may be jealous of one's honour——'

'You have none,' said Jeanne de Sonnaz coolly. 'Your wife told you so long ago. You have rank, but you have not honour. You do not know what it means. My poor Paul does, but then he is stupid and *arriéré*. I think if I told Paul to kill you, it might perhaps arrange things—and then how happy they would be, these——

Purs amants sur terre égarés ! '

Zouroff looked at her fixedly; his face grew anxious, sullen, and pale.

'Jeanne, say out; what is it you want me to do?'

'I want to reconcile your wife and you, of course,' said Jeanne de Sonnaz, driving her cane through the yielding turf. 'That, of course, first of all, if possible. If impossible, I would have you divorced from her. Things, as they are, are ridiculous; and,' she added, in a lower breath, as the children and their balloons drew near, running against the wind, 'and they may in time compromise me, which I do not choose to permit.'

Zouroff understood what she required of him; and he felt a coward and a brute, as his sister had called him.

The lily might not be easy to bruise, but it was easy to soil it.

'Corrèze is certainly in Styria,' she added, as the children joined them.

Zouroff stood looking down on the green turf and the bright blossoms of the asters with moody eyes; he was thinking—what beast of prey was ever so hard of grip, so implacable in appetite, as a cruel woman? And yet this woman held him.

He dared not disobey, because he could not bear to lose her.

That autumn day, so sunny, balmy, and radiant in the sheltered gardens and forests of Arcachon, was winter at Szarisla. Sudden storms and heavy falls of snow had made the forests bare, the plains white; the winds were hurricanes, the thermometer was at zero, and the wolves ranged the lonely plateaux and moor-lands in bands, hungered and rash. Szarisla in autumn was colder and drearier

than Félicité could ever be in mid-winter, and the great, bare pile of the Castle buildings rose black and sombre from out the unbroken world of whiteness.

There was an equally unchangeable melancholy around; it was in the midst of a district intensely and bitterly national; the Princes Zouroff were amongst the most accursed names of Poland, and the few, far-scattered nobles who dwelt in the province would no more have crossed the threshold of Szarisla than they would have kissed the cheek of Mouravieff, or the foot of the Gospodar. Vere lived in absolute solitude, and knew that it was as virtually also a captivity as was ever that of Mary, or of Arabella, Stuart.

Of course she was the Princess Vera, the mistress of Szarisla nominally and actually, but none the less she knew that every hour was watched, that every word was listened to, and that, whilst there was obsequious deference to all her commands, yet, had she expressed a wish to leave the place, she would have been reverentially entreated to await the wishes of

the Prince, and would not have found a man in her stables bold enough to harness her horses for her flight.

She had arrived there late one evening, and, despite the fires, the lights, the torches in the courts, the large household assembled in the entrance, a chill like that of the catacombs seemed around her, and she had felt that living she entered a grave.

Szarisla was an absolute solitude. The nearest town was a three days' journey of long, bad roads; and the town, when reached, was an obscure and miserable place. The peasantry were sullen and disaffected. The district was under the iron heel of a hated governor, and its scanty population was mute in useless and gloomy resentment. She had no friend, no society, no occupation save such as she chose to make for herself; she was waited upon with frigid ceremonial and etiquette, and she was conscious that she was watched incessantly. Many women would have lost their senses, their health, or both, in that bitter weariness of blank, chill, silent days.

Vere, whose childish training now stood her in fair stead and service, summoned all her courage, all her pride, and resisted the depression that was like a malady, the lassitude that might be the precursor of mental or bodily disease. She rode constantly, till the snow fell; when the snow came, and the frost, she had the wild young horses put in the sleigh, and drove for leagues through the pine woods, and over the moorlands. Air and movement were, she knew, the only true physicians. Little by little she made her way into the homes, and into the hearts of the suspicious and disaffected peasantry; it was slow work, and hard, and thankless, but she was not easily discouraged or rebuffed. She could do little, for she was met at all times in her wishes for charity by the adamantine barrier of 'the prince forbids it;' she had no more power, as she bitterly realised, than if she had been his serf. But all that personal influence could do, she did; and that was not little. She was the first living creature who had borne the name

of Zouroff that had not been loathed and cursed at Szarisla.

Personal beauty is a rare sorcery, and when the fair face of the Princess Vera looked on them through the falling snow in the forests, or the dim light of their own wood cabins, the people could not altogether shut their hearts to her, though she bore the accursed name.

She was very unhappy; wearily and hopelessly so, because she saw no possibility of any other life than the captivity here, or the yet more arduous captivity of the great world, and in her memory she always heard the song,

> Si vous saviez que je vous aime,
> Surtout si vous saviez comment!

But she would not let her sorrow and her pain make slaves of her.

The wild and frequent storms of wind and snow tried her most hardly, because they mewed her in those gloomy rooms, and sunless corridors, which had seen so much human tyranny and human woe, and the long, black nights, when only the howl of the hurricane and the howl of the wolves were heard, were

very terrible; she would walk up and down the panelled rooms through those midnight hours, that seemed like an eternity, and wondered if her husband had wished to drive her mad that he had sent her here. Her French women left her, unable to bear the cold, the dreariness, the loneliness; she had only Russians and Poles about her. At times in those lonely, ghastly nights, made hideous by the moans of the beasts and the roar of the winds, she thought of the Opera-house of Paris; she thought of the face of Faust. Then in that emptiness and darkness of her life she began to realise that she loved Corrèze; began to understand all that she cost to him in pain and vain regret.

If she would receive Jeanne de Sonnaz she could go back; go back to the splendour, the colour, the light of life; go back to the world where Corrèze reigned, where his voice was heard, where his eyes would answer hers. But it never once occurred to her to yield.

Now and then the truth came to her mind that Sergius Zouroff had sent her to this

solitude not only as a vengeance, but as a temptation. Then all the strength in her repelled the very memory of Corrèze.

'Would my husband make me like Jeanne de Sonnaz,' she thought with a shudder of disgust, 'so that I may no longer have the right to scorn her?'

And she strove with all her might to keep her mind calm and clear, her body in health, her sympathies awake for other sorrows than her own.

She studied the dead languages, which she had half forgotten, with the old priest of Szarisla, and conjured away the visions that assailed her in those endless and horrible nights, with the sonorous cadence of the Greek poets; and in the daytime, when the frost had made the white world firm under foot, passed almost all the hours of light sending her fiery horses through the glittering and rarefied air.

So the months passed, and it was mid-winter. Letters and journals told her that the gay world went on its course, but to her it

seemed as utterly alien as it could do to any worker in the depths of the salt or the quicksilver mines that supplied his wealth to Prince Zouroff. The world had already forgotten her. Society only said, 'Princesse Vera is passing the winter in Poland; so eccentric; but she was always strange and a saint;' and then, with the usual little laugh, Society added, 'There is something about Corrèze.'

But the world does not long talk, even calumniously, of what is absent.

Prince Zouroff was on the boulevards; he gave his usual great dinners; he played as usual at his clubs; he entered his horses as usual for great races; the world did not concern itself largely about his wife.

She was in Poland.

She committed the heaviest sin against Society, the only one it never pardons. She was absent. No one had even the consolation to think that she had her lover with her.

Corrèze was singing in Berlin.

Madame Nelaguine, forcing herself to do what she loathed, went across Europe in the

cold, wet weather as swiftly as she could travel, and visited Szarisla.

She strove to persuade her sister-in-law to accept the inevitable, and return to the Hotel Zouroff and such consolations as the great world and its homage could contain.

'Be reasonable, Vera,' she urged, with the tears standing in her keen, marmoset-like eyes. 'My dear, society is made up of women like Jeanne de Sonnaz. Receive her, what does it matter? It is not as if you loved your husband, as if your heart were wounded. Receive her. What will it cost you? You need never even see her in intimacy. Go to her on her day, let her come to you on yours. Show yourself half an hour at her balls, let her show herself at yours. That is all. What does it amount to? what does it cost? Nothing.'

'Little, no doubt,' answered Vere. 'Only —all one's self-respect.'

And she was not to be changed or persuaded.

'I shall live and die here, very likely,' she said at last, weary of resistance. 'It

is as well as any other place. It is better than Paris. Your brother has sent me here to coerce me. Go back and tell him that force will not succeed with me. I am not a coward.'

Madame Nelaguine, grieved and yet impatient, shuddered, and left the bleakness and loneliness of Vere's prison-house with relief, and hurried home to the world and its ways, and said impetuously and bitterly to her brother, 'Do not darken my doors, Sergius, while your wife is shut in that gaol of ice. Do not come to me, do not speak to me. You are a brute. Would to heaven Jeanne de Sonnaz were your wife; then you would be dealt with aright! Are you mad? do you wish to make her faithless? Can you think she will bear such a life as that? Can you leave a woman as young as she without friends, lovers, children, and expect her to change to snow, like the country you shut her in?—are you mad? If she shame herself there any way—any way—can you blame her? Can you take a girl, a child, and teach her what the passions of men are, and

then bid her lead a nun's life just when she has reached the full splendour and force of her womanhood——?'

'She is a saint, you say,' he answered with a smile; and he and his sister never spoke from that hour. In the boudoir of the Faubourg St. Germain his friend knew well how to surround him with an influence which little by little isolated him, and alienated him from all who had the courage to speak of his wife.

Jeanne de Sonnaz had one set purpose, the purpose which she had let him see in her at Arcachon; and until she should succeed in it she suffered no hand but her own to guide him.

The lily might have a stem of steel, and never be bent; but it could be broken.

Soilless though it might remain in its solitude amidst the snow, it should be broken; she had said it in her soul.

'*Ce que femme veut, l'homme veut,*' was the proverb as her experience read it.

All that there had been of manliness in Sergius Zouroff's nature resisted her still in this thing that she sought; he still had a faith in his wife that his anger against her did

not change; in his eyes Vere was purity incarnate, and he could have laughed aloud in the face of suspicion. To ruin by open doubt and calumnious accusation a creature he knew to be sinless, seemed to him so vile that he could not bring himself to do an act so base.

He sent her into captivity, and he kept her there without mercy, but to hem her in with falsehood, to dishonour her by affected belief in her dishonour, was a lower deep than he could stoop to, even at the bidding of his mistress.

That her solitude was the sharpest and most terrible form of temptation he knew well, and he exposed her to it ruthlessly; willing she should fall, if to fall she chose. But whilst she was innocent, to assume and assert her guilty was what he would not do. Nay, there were even times, when the fatal drug of Jeanne de Sonnaz's presence was not on him, that he himself realised that he was a madman, who cast away the waters of life for a draught of poison, a jewel for a stone.

But he thrust aside the thought as it arose. He had surrendered himself to the will of his mistress. He had put his wife away for ever.

CHAPTER XXVI.

One day, when the snow was falling, a traveller reached the gates of Szarisla.

He was wrapped in fur from head to foot; he wished to see the Princesse Zouroff.

'No one sees her,' answered the guardian of the gates; 'it is the Prince's order.'

'But I am a friend; will you not take my name to her?'

'I will not. No one enters; it is the Prince's order.'

To the entreaties of the stranger, and to his gold, the custodian of the entrance-way was obdurate. In his boyhood he had felt the knout, and he dreaded his master.

The stranger went away.

The next day was the Immaculate Conception. At Szarisla the catholic religion was permitted by a special concession of a French princess Zouroff, and its functions were still allowed by her descendants.

There was no other church for the peasants than that which was part of the great building, once the monastery of Szarisla. They all flocked to it upon holy days. It was sombre and ill lit, but gorgeous in Byzantine colour and taste from the piety of dead Zouroff princes.

The peasantry went over the snow through its doors; the stranger went with them; the mistress of Szarisla was at the midday mass, as well as the household.

In the stillness, after the elevation of the host, a voice arose, and sang the Salutaris Hostia.

A warmth like the glow of summer ran through all the veins of Vere; she trembled; her face was lifted for one moment, then she dropped it once more on her hands.

The peasants and the household, awe-struck

and amazed, listened with rapt wonder to what they thought was the song of angels; they could not see the singer. Kneeling as in prayer, with her face hidden, the mistress of Szarisla, who was also the captive of Szarisla, never moved.

The divine melody floated through the dimness and the stillness of the lonely Polish church; the priest stood motionless; the people were mute; some of them wept in ecstasy. When it ceased, they prostrated themselves on the earth. They believed that the angels of God were amongst them.

Vere arose slowly and stood pale and still, shrouded from head to foot in fur.

She looked towards the shadows behind the altar. There she saw Corrèze, as she had known that she would see him.

He came forward and bowed low. His eyes had a timidity and a fear in the wistfulness of their appeal to her.

They stood before each other, and were silent.

'Is this how you obey me?' her glance said to him without words.

'Forgive me,' he murmured aloud.

By this time the people had arisen, and were gazing at him, amazed to find him but a mortal man.

Vere turned to the priest, and her voice trembled a little; 'You are not angry, father? Will you not rather thank this—traveller?—he is known to me.'

In Latin the priest spoke his admiration and his thanks, and in Latin the singer replied.

Vere looked at him, and said simply, 'Come.'

Corrèze obeyed her, and moved by her side. He dared not touch her hand, or speak any word that might offend her. He could see nothing of her face or form for the black furs that swept from her head to her feet. She passed into the sacristy with a passing word to the priest. She threw the heavy door close with her own hands, and let the furs fall off her in a heap upon the floor.

Then for the first time she looked at him.

'Why do you come? It is unworthy——'

He moved as if a blow had been struck him, his eyes, longing and passionate, burned like stars; he too cast his furs down; he stood before her with a proud humiliation in his attitude and his look.

'That is a harsh word,' he said simply; 'I have been in this district for weeks; I have seen you pass with your swift horses; I have been in your church before now; when you are imprisoned here do you think I could live elsewhere, do you think I could sing in gay cities? For some months I knew nothing; I heard that you were on your Russian estates, and nothing more; when I was in Styria five weeks ago, I heard for the first time that you were in Poland. A man who knew your husband spoke of Szarisla as no place for a woman. Then I came. Are you offended? Was I wrong? You cannot be here of your own will? It is a prison. When I rang at the gates they told me it was the Prince's order that you should see no one. It is a captivity!'

Vere was silent.

'You should not have come,' she said with

an effort; 'I am alone here; it was ungenerous.'

The blood mounted to his face.

'Cannot you make excuse?' he murmured. 'I know what Russians are; I know what their tyrannies are; I trembled for you, I knew no rest night or day till I saw the walls of Szarisla, and then you passed by me in the woods in the snow, and I saw you were living and well; then I breathed again, then all the frozen earth seemed full of spring and sunshine. Forgive me;—how could I lead my life singing in cities, and laughing with the world, while I thought you were alone in this hotbed of disaffection, of hatred, of assassination, where men are no better than the wolves? For the love of heaven, tell me why you are here! Is it your husband's madness, or his vengeance?'

She was silent still. He looked at her and stooped, and said very low: 'You learned the truth of Jeanne de Sonnaz. Was it that?'

She gave a gesture of assent. The hot colour came into her averted face.

Corrèze stifled a curse in his throat, 'It is a vengeance then?'

'In a sense, perhaps,' she answered with effort. 'I will not receive her. I will never see her again.'

'And your banishment is her work. But why imprison yourself? If you resisted, you would have all Europe with you.'

'I obey my husband,' said Vere simply, 'and I am in peace here.'

'In peace? In prison! We spoke once of Siberia; this is a second Siberia, and he consigns you to it in your innocence, to spare the guilty! Oh my God!'——

His emotion choked him as if a hand were at his throat; he gazed at her and could have fallen at her feet and kissed them.

'Noble people, and guiltless people, live in Siberia, and die there,' said Vere with a faint smile. 'It is not worse for me than for them, and the spring will come sometime; and the peasantry are learning not to hate me; it is a better life than that of Paris.'

'But it is a captivity! You cannot leave it if you would; he does not give you the means to pass the frontier.'

'He would prevent my doing so, no doubt.'

'It is an infamy! It is an infamy. Why will you bear it, why will you not summon the help of the law against it?'

'If a man struck you, would you call in the aid of the law?'

'No. I should kill him.'

'When I am struck, I am mute: that is a woman's courage; a man's courage is vengeance, but ours cannot be.'

Corrèze sighed: a heavy, passionate, restless sigh, as under a weighty burden.

'A man may avenge you,' he muttered.

'No man has any title,' she said a little coldly. 'I am the wife of Prince Zouroff.'

A greater coldness than that of the ice world without, fell on the heart of her hearer. He did not speak for many moments. The snow fell; the wind moaned, the grey dull atmosphere, seemed between him and the woman he loved, like a barrier of ice.

He said abruptly, almost in a whisper: 'The world says you should divorce him; you have the right——'

'I have the right.'

'Then you will use it?'

'No—no,' she answered after a pause. 'I will not take any public action against my husband.'

'He wishes you to divorce him?'

'No doubt. I shall be here until I do so.'

'And that will be——'

'Never.'

'Never?'

She shook her head.

'I think,' she said in a very low tone, 'if you understand me at all, you understand that I would never do that. Those courts are only for shameless women.'

He was silent. All that it was in his heart to urge, he dared not even hint. A great anguish seemed to stifle speech in him. He could have striven against every other form of opposition, but he could not strive against this which sprang from her very nature, from the

inmost beauty and holiness of the soul that he adored.

The salt tears rose in his eyes.

'You have indeed kept yourself unspotted from the world!' he said wearily, and then there was silence.

It lasted long; suddenly he broke it, and all the floodgates of his eloquence were opened, and all the suffering and the worship that were in him broke up to light.

'Forgive me,' he said passionately. 'Nay, perhaps you will never forgive, and yet speak I must. What will you do with your life? Will you shut it here in ice, like an imprisoned thing, for sake of a guilty and heedless man, a coarse and thankless master? Will you let your years go by like beautiful flowers whose blossom no eyes behold? 'Will you live in solitude and joylessness for sake of a brute who finds his sport in shame? Your marriage was an error, a frightful sacrifice, a martyrdom, will you bear it always, will you never take your rights to liberty and light, will you never be young in your youth?'

'I am his wife,' said Vere simply; 'nothing can change that.' She shuddered a little as she added: 'God himself cannot undo what is done.'

'And he leaves you for Jeanne de Sonnaz!'

'I rule my life by my own measure, not his. He forgets that he is my husband, but I do not forget that I am his wife.'

'But why remember it? He has ceased to deserve the remembrance—he never deserved it—never in the first hour of your marriage to him.'

Vere's face flushed.

'If I forgot it, what should I be better than the wife of Paul de Sonnaz?'

'You are cruel!'

'Cruel?'

'Cruel—to me.'

He spoke so low that the words scarcely stirred the air, then he knelt down on the ground before her and kissed the hem of her gown.

'I dare not say to you what I would say;

you are so far above all other women, but you know so well, you have known so long, that all my life is yours, to use or throw away as you choose. Long ago I sang to you, and you know so well, I think, all that the song said. I would serve you, I would worship you with the love that is religion, I would leave the stage and the world and art and fame, I would die to men, if I might live for you——'

She shook as she heard him, as a tall lily-stem shakes in a strong wind; she sighed wearily; she was quite silent. Was she insulted, angered, alienated? He could not tell. His ardent and eloquent eyes, now dim and feverish, in vain sought hers. She looked away always at the grey misty plain, the wide waste, treeless and sunless, swept with low driving clouds.

'You knew it always?' he muttered at length; 'always, surely?'

'Yes.'

The single word came painfully and with hesitation from her lips; she put her hand on

her heart to still its beating; for the first time in all her years she was afraid, and afraid of herself.

'Yes,' she said once more. 'I knew it lately —but I thought you never would speak of it to me. You should have been silent always—always; if I were indeed a religion to you, you would have been so. Men do not speak so of what they honour. Am I no better than my husband's mistresses in your eyes?'

She drew herself erect with a sudden anger, and drew the skirt of her gown from his hands; then a shiver as of cold passed over her, a sob rose in her throat; she stood motionless, her face covered with her hands.

He wished he had died a thousand deaths ere he had spoken. He rose to his feet and stood before her.

'Since the day by the sea that I gathered you the rose, I have loved you; where is the harm? All the years I have been silent. Had I seen you in peace and in honour I would have been silent to my grave. I have been a sinner often, but I would never have sinned against

you. I would never have dared to ask you to stoop and hear my sorrow, to soil your hand to soothe my pain. I saw you outraged, injured, forsaken, and your rivals the base creatures that I could buy as well as he if I chose, and yet I said nothing; I waited, hoping your life might pass calmly by me, ready, if of any defence or any use I could be. What was the harm or the insult in that? You are the golden cup, holy to me; he drinks from the cabaret glasses; can you ask me, a man, and not old, and with life in my veins and not ice, to be patient and mute when I see that, and find you in solitude here?'

He spoke with the simplicity and the strength of intense but restrained emotion. All the passion in him was on fire, but he choked it into silence and stillness; he would not seem to insult her in her loneliness.

Vere never looked at him. All the colour had left her face, her hands were crossed upon her breast above the mark which her husband's blow had left there; she stood silent.

She remembered her husband's words: 'All

women are alike when tempted.' For the first time in her pure and proud life temptation came to her assailing her with insidious force.

'What do you ask?' she said abruptly at last. 'Do you know what you ask? You ask me to be no better a thing than Jeanne de Sonnaz! Go—my life was empty before; now it is full—full of shame. It is you who have filled it. Go!'

'These are bitter words——'

'They are bitter; they are true. What is the use of sophism? You love me; yes; and what is it you would have me do? cheat the world with hidden intrigue, or brave it with guilty effrontery? One or the other; what else but one or the other could love be now for us?'

Then, with a sudden recollection of the only plea that would have power to persuade or force to move him, she added.

'To serve me best—go back to Paris; let Jeanne de Sonnaz hear you in all your glory there.'

He understood.

He stood silent, while the large tears stood beneath his drooping eyelids.

'I would sooner you bade me die.'

'It is so easy to die,' she said, with a passing weary smile. 'If—if you love me indeed—go.'

'At once?'

She bent her head.

He looked at her long; he did not touch her; he did not speak to her; and he went. The door of the church closed with a heavy sound behind him.

His footsteps were lost upon the snow.

When the old priest entered the building he found the mistress of Szarisla kneeling before the altar.

She remained so long motionless that at length the old man was frightened and dared to touch her.

She was insensible.

Her household thought she had fainted from the cold.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TEN days later Corrèze sang in the midnight mass of Notre Dame. The face of the Duchesse de Sonnaz clouded. '*C'est une impasse*,' she muttered.

The winter went on its course and the spring-time came.

Corrèze remained in Paris.

He sang, as of old, and his triumphs were many, and envy and detraction could only creep after him dully and dumbly. For the summer he took a little château in the old-world village of Marly-le-Roi; and, there, gathered other artists about him. The world of women found him changed. He had grown cold and

almost stern; amours he had none; to the seductions that had of old found him so easy a prey he was steeled.

In him, this indifference was no virtue. All women had become without charm to him. The dominion of a noble and undivided love was upon him; that love was nothing but pain; yet the pain was sacred to him. His lips would never touch the golden cup, but the memory of it forbade him to drink of any earthly wines of pleasure or of vanity.

His love, like all great love, was consecration.

'He will end in a monastery,' said the neglected Delilahs; and Sergius Zouroff heard them say it.

A sombre jealousy began to awaken on him as it had awakened at the sight of the necklace of the moth on the breast of Vere. What right had this singer to be faithful to the memory of his wife while he to his wife was faithless?

'Pur amant sur terre égaré!'

murmured Jeanne de Sonnaz again, with a little laugh, when she saw Corrèze passing out of

the opera-house alone, and added in the ear of Zouroff: 'How he shames *you!* Are you not ashamed?'

Zouroff grew sullen and suspicious. He began to hate the sight of the face of Corrèze, or that of the letters of his name on the walls of Paris. It seemed to him that all the world was filled with this nightingale's voice. As the horses of Corrèze passed him on the Boulevards, as Corrèze entered the St. Arnaud or the Mirliton, when he was himself in either club; when the crowds gathered and waited in the streets, and he heard it was to see Corrèze pass by after some fresh success in his art, then Zouroff began to curse him bitterly.

There was a regard in the eyes of Corrèze when they glanced at his that seemed to him to say with a superb scorn: 'I am faithful to your wife. And you?'

This hatred slumbered like a dull and sullen fire in him, but it was a living fire, and the lips of Jeanne de Sonnaz fanned it and kept it alive. With ridicule, with hint, with conjecture, with

irony, one way or another she stung him a hundred times a week with the name of Corrèze.

'She is in Poland, he is in Paris; what can you pretend there can be between them?' he said to her once, in savage impatience. Then she smiled.

'Distance is favourable to those loves of the soul. Did I not quote you Sully Prudhomme's

Purs amants sur terre égarés?'

Once in that spring-time Zouroff wrote one line to his wife.

'If you are tired of Szarisla you know on what terms you can return to Paris?'

He received no answer.

He was perplexed.

It seemed to him impossible that she could have courage, patience and strength, to remain in that solitude.

'It is obstinacy,' he said. 'It is stubbornness!'

'It is love,' said Jeanne de Sonnaz, with a little smile.

Zouroff laughed also, but he chafed.

'Love! for the wolves or for the Poles?'

'It is love,' said his friend. 'It is the same love that makes Corrèze live like an anchorite in the midst of Paris, which makes your wife live like a saint at Szarisla. It is their idea of love, it is not mine or yours. It is the dissipation of the soul. Have you never heard of it?

> Aux ivresses même impunies
> Vous préférez un deuil plus beau,
> Et vos lèvres même au tombeau
> Attendent le droit d'être unies.

When our poet wrote that he saw, or foresaw, the tragic and frigid loves of your wife and Corrèze. What can you do? It is of no use to swear. You cannot cite them *aux tribunaux* for a merely spiritual attraction, for a docile and mournful passion that is *en deuil.*'

Then she laughed and made a little grimace at him.

'You cannot keep your wife in Poland all the same,' she said, seriously. 'It becomes ridiculous. It is not she and Corrèze who are so; it is you.'

He knew that she meant what she had meant at Arcachon.

She was that day in his house; she had called there, she had little Claire with her whom she had sent to play in the garden under the budding lilacs; she was about to fetch Duc Paul from the Union, being a woman who was always careful to be seen often with her husband. Meanwhile she was in her friend's own suite of rooms in the Hotel Zouroff; she was going about them, to and fro, as she talked.

'I must write a note to leave for Nadine,' she said as she went to his bureau. 'Why have you quarrelled with Nadine? It is so stupid to quarrel. If one has an enemy one should be more intimate with him, or her, than with anyone else, and your sister is your friend though she has an exaggerated adoration of Vera, sympathy through dissimilarity, the metaphysicians call it. *Ciel!* what have you here? All women's letters! I will bet you the worth of your whole entries for Chantilly that the only woman whose letters are absent from this coffer is your wife!'

She had seen a large old casket of tortoise-shell and gilded bronze. The key was in the

lock, it was full of notes and letters; she had pulled it towards her, turned the key, and was now tossing over its contents with much entertainment and equal recklessness.

'It is too scandalous,' she cried, as she ran her eye over one here and there. 'If there are not one-half of my acquaintances in this box! How imprudent of you to keep such things as these. I never wrote to you; I never write. None but mad women ever write to any man except their tailor. I shall take this box home——'

Zouroff, who only slowly awoke to the perception of what she was doing, strode to the bureau with a cry of remonstrance. 'Jeanne! what are you about?' he said, as he strove to get the casket from her. 'There is nothing that concerns you; they are all old letters, those, very old; you must not do that.'

'Must not? Who knows that word? not I,' said his friend. 'I shall take the box away. It will amuse me while they put on my hair. Novels are dull; I will send you this thing back to-morrow.'

'You cannot be serious!' stammered Zouroff, as he tried to wrest the box from her.

'I was never more serious,' said his visitor, coolly. 'Do not scream; do not swear. You know I do what I like. I want especially to see how my friends write to my friend. It is your own fault; I thought men always burnt letters. I wonder if Paul has a box like this. Adieu!'

She went away, with the coffer in her carriage, to fetch her husband on the Boulevard des Capucines, and Zouroff dared not arrest her; and the casket of letters went home to the Faubourg with her.

In the morning she said to him: 'They were really too compromising, those letters. You had no business to keep them. I have burned them all, and Claire has got the coffer for her doll's trousseau. I never thought much of my sex at any time; I think nothing now. And, really, they should no more be trusted with ink than children with firearms. Pooh! why are you so furious? They were all old letters, from half a hundred different people;

you have nothing to do with any one of the writers of them now; and of course I am as secret as the grave, as discreet as a *saint-père.*'

With any other woman he would have let loose a torrent of abuse; with her he was sullen but apparently pacified.

After all they were old letters, and he could not very clearly remember whose letters had been shut away in that old tortoise-shell casket.

'I thought men always burnt these things,' said Jeanne de Sonnaz. 'But, indeed, if women are foolish enough to write them they deserve to be unfortunate enough to have them kept. I never wrote to any man, except to Paul himself—and Worth.'

'You are a model of virtue,' said her companion, grimly.

'I am something better,' said his friend. 'I am a woman of sense. *Apropos*, how long will this retreat in Poland last? It cannot go on; it becomes absurd. The world is already talking. The place of the Princess Zouroff is in the Hotel Zouroff.'

'It cannot be her place,' said Zouroff, savagely. 'She is—she is—obdurate still. I suppose she is content; the frost has broken, the weather is good even there.'

Jeanne de Sonnaz looked him in the eyes.

'Weather is not all that a woman of twenty requires for her felicity. The whole affair is absurd; I shall not permit it to go on. I say again, what I said last year at Arcachon. It may end in compromising me, and that I will not have. You must take your wife back to your house here, and live with her later at Félicité, or you must prove to society that you are justified in separating from her; one or the other. As it is you are ridiculous, and I—I am suspected. *Faut en finir.*'

Zouroff turned away and walked gloomily to and fro the chamber.

'I will not take her back,' he muttered. 'Besides—probably—she would not come.'

He dared not say to his companion that he could not insist on his wife's return without an open scandal, since she would for ever refuse to

receive or to visit the Duchesse de Sonnaz, once her guest and her friend.

'Besides, probably, she would not come!' echoed Jeanne de Sonnaz, with a shrill laugh that made his sullenness rage. 'My poor bear! is that all your growls and your teeth can do for you? You cannot master a woman of twenty, who has nothing in the world but what you gave her at your marriage. Frankly, it is too ridiculous. You must make a choice if you would not be the laughing-stock of society; either you must have your wife here in Paris before all the world, and I will be the first to welcome her, or you must justify your separation from her; one of the two.'

'I shall do neither!'

'Then, *mon ami*, I shall be very sorry indeed, because we have been friends so long, but unless you do one or the other, and that speedily, I shall be obliged with infinite regret to side with your sister and all the House of Herbert against you. I shall be obliged to close my doors to you; I cannot know a man who is cruel to an innocent wife. There! you

know I do what I say. I will give you a week, two weeks, to think of it. Afterwards I shall take my course according to yours. I shall be very sorry not to see you any more, my dear Sergius; but I should be more sorry if the world were to think I supported you in injustice and unkindness to Princess Zouroff. Please to go now; I have a million things to do, and a deputation about my *créche* is waiting for me downstairs.'

Sergius Zouroff went out of her house in a towering passion; yet it never occurred to him to separate from his tormentor. She had an empire over him that he had long ceased to resist; he could no more have lived without seeing Jeanne de Sonnaz than he could live without his draughts of brandy, his nights of gambling. As there is love without dominion, so there is dominion without love.

He knew very well that she never wasted words; that she never made an empty menace. He knew that her calculations were always cool and keen, and that when she thought her own interests menaced, she was pitiless. She

would keep her word; that he knew well. What could he do? It was impossible to recall his wife, since he knew that his wife would never receive Jeanne de Sonnaz. The presence of his wife in Paris could only complicate and increase the difficulties that surrounded him; had he not banished her to Poland for that very cause? He cursed the inconsistencies and the insolences of women. The submission of his wife to his will and his command had softened his heart towards her; he had vague impulses of compassion and of pardon towards this woman who was so unyielding in her dignity, so obedient in her actions, so silent under her wrongs. As the year before, after he had found her the victim of her mother's falsehood, some better impulse, some tenderer instinct than was common with him had begun once more to move him towards that mute captive of his will at Szarisla. But Jeanne de Sonnaz had always been careful to smother those impulses at their birth under ridicule; to arouse in their stead anger, impatience, and the morbidness of a vague jealousy.

Without the influence of Jeanne de Sonnaz Zouroff would have loved his wife; not nobly because he was not noble, nor faithfully, because he could not be otherwise than inconstant; but still, with more honesty of affection, more indulgence, and more purity, than he had ever had excited in him by any other creature. But perpetually, as that better impulse rose, she had been at hand to extinguish it by irony, by mockery, or by suggestion. He left her house, now, in bitter rage, which in justice should have fallen on her, but by habit fell instead upon his absent wife. Why could not Vere have been like any other of the many highborn maidens of whom he could have made a Princess Zouroff, and been indifferent and malleable, and wisely blind, and willing to kiss Jeanne de Sonnaz on the cheek, as great ladies salute each other all over the world, no matter what feuds may divide or rivalries may sting them? Why must she be a woman unfitted for her century, made only for those old legendary and saintly days when the bread had changed to roses in St. Elizabeth's hands?

A devilish wish that he was ashamed of, even as it rose up in him, came over him, without his being able to drive it away. He wished he could find his wife guilty. He knew her as innocent as children unborn; yet almost he wished he could find her weak and tempted like the rest.

His course would then be easy.

Throughout the adulation of the world she had remained untempted, and she remained so still, in that solitude, that dulness, that captivity which would have driven any other to summon a lover to her side before a month of that joyless existence had flown. But then she had no lover. He was certain she had none. Not all the mockery and the insistence of his mistress could make him seriously credit any infidelity, even of thought or sentiment, in Vere. 'And had she one I would strangle him to-morrow,' he thought, with that vanity of possession which so sadly and cruelly survives the death of passion, the extinction of all love. Justify your separation from her, said his friend; but how? Sergius Zouroff was not yet low

enough to accuse falsely a woman he believed from his soul to be innocent. He was perplexed, and bitterly angered against her, against himself, against all the world. He had meant to break her spirit and her will by her exile; he had never dreamed that she would bear it in patience and in silence; knowing women well, he had fully expected that the strength of her opposition would soon wear itself out, that she would soon see that to meet Jeanne de Sonnaz in society and exchange the commonplaces of courtesy and custom was preferable to a life in the snows of the north, with no one to admire her loveliness, no pleasure to beguile her days and nights; he had thought that one single week of the winter weather, with its lonely evenings in that deserted place, would banish all power of resistance in his wife. Instead of this, she remained there without a word, even of regret or of protest.

He was enraged that he had ever sent her into exile. He would not retreat from a step he had once taken; he would not withdraw from a position he had thought it for his dignity to

assume. But he felt that he had committed the worst of all errors in his own sight; an error that would end in making him absurd in the eyes of the world. He could not keep his wife for ever at Szarisla; society would wonder, her family would murmur; even his empress, perhaps, require explanation: and what excuse could he give? He could not say to any of these, 'I separate from her because she has justly thought herself injured by Jeanne de Sonnaz.'

As, lost in sullen meditation, he went down the Rue Scribe to go to his favourite club, he passed close by Corrèze.

Corrèze was walking with a German Margrave, who nodded to Zouroff with a little greeting, for they were friends; Corrèze looked him full in the face, and gave him no salutation.

The insolence (as it seemed to him) filled up the measure of his wrath.

'I will slit the throat of that nightingale,' he muttered as they passed.

At that moment a friend stopped him in some agitation. 'Good heavens, have you not heard? Paul de Sonnaz is dead; his horse has

thrown him just before the door of the club. He fell with his head on the kerbstone; his neck is broken.'

Zouroff, without a word, went into the Jockey Club and into the chamber upstairs, whither they had borne the senseless frame of the Duc de Sonnaz, who had died in an instant, without pain. Zouroff looked down on him, and his own face grew pale and his eyes clouded. Paul de Sonnaz had been a good, simple, unaffected man, *bon prince* always, and unconscious of his wrongs; docile to his wife and blinded by her, cordial to his friends and trustful of them.

'Poor simpleton! he was very useful to me,' muttered Zouroff, as he stood by the inanimate body of the man he had always deceived. It was of himself he thought, in the unchangeable egotism of a long life of self-indulgence.

When Zouroff went to his own house that day he found the usual weekly report from his faithful servant Ivan. Ivan affirmed that all things went on as usual and nothing happened, but ventured to add:

'The climate does not seem to suit the

princess. She rides a great deal, but she appears to lose strength, and the women say that she sleeps but little.'

His sister came to him a little later in that day.

'It is of no use for us to quarrel, Sergius,' she said to him. 'I shall do Vera no good in that way. I am anxious; very anxious; she writes to me as of old, quite calmly; but Ivan writes, on the other hand, that she is ill and losing strength. Why do you not recall her? Paul de Sonnaz is dead; his wife must for some time be in retreat. Vera is your shield and safety now; without her, Jeanne would marry you.'

Zouroff frowned.

'My wife can always return if she please,' he said evasively.

Would she return?

He could not see the Duchesse de Sonnaz, who was surrounded by her family, and that of her husband, in the first hours of her bereavement; and without her counsels, her permission, he dared do nothing.

'I will write to Vera,' he promised his sister; but she could not persuade him to write then and there. 'Szarisla is healthy enough,' he answered, impatient of her fears. 'Besides, a woman who can ride for many hours a day cannot be very weak.'

He knew Szarisla was a place that was trying to the health of the strongest by reason of its bitter cold springs and its scorching summers, with the noxious exhalation of its marshes. But he would not confess it.

'She could return if she chose,' he added, to put an end to the remonstrances of the Princess Nelaguine. 'As for her health, if you are disturbed about it send any physician you like that you employ to see her; she has never been so well as she was before the birth of that dead child in Russia.'

'I shall not send a physician to her as if she were mad,' answered his sister with anger.

'Send Corrèze,' said Zouroff with a sardonic little laugh which he knew was vile.

'Would you had died yourself, Sergius,

instead of that poor imbecile, whom you cheated every hour that he lived!'

Zouroff shrugged his shoulders. 'I regret Paul—*pauvre garçon!*' he said simply, and said the truth.

'Why do you not regret your own sins?'

'They are the only things that have ever amused me,' he replied with equal truth. 'And I thought you were an *esprit fort*, Nadine; I thought your new school of thinkers had all agreed that there is no such thing as sin any more; nothing but hereditary bias, for which no one is responsible. If we are not to quarrel again, pray make me no scenes.'

'We will not quarrel; it is childish. But you promise me to recall your wife?'

'I promise you—yes.'

'When I shall have seen Jeanne,' he added in his own thoughts.

Nadine Nelaguine went to her own house angered, dissatisfied and anxious. She was a clever woman, and she was penetrated with the caution of the world, as a petrified branch with the lime that hardens it. She smiled cheerfully always when she spoke of her sister-in-law, and

said tranquilly in society that she had not Vera's tastes, she could not dedicate herself to solitude and the Polish poor as Vera did. She kept her own counsel and did not call in others to witness her pain or her dilemma. She knew that the sympathy of society is chiefly curiosity, and that when it has any title to pity it is quite sure to sneer.

She held her peace and waited, but her often callous heart ached with a heavy regret and anxiety.

'She has so much to endure!' she thought with hot tears in her sharp keen eyes. 'So much, so much!—and it will pass her patience. She is young; she does not know that a woman must never resist. A woman should only—deceive. It is Jeanne's work, all her work; she has separated them; I knew well that she would. Oh, the fool that he is—the fool and the brute! If I, and Jeanne, and Lady Dorothy, and all the women that are like us, were eaten by dogs like Jezebel the world would only be the better and the cleaner. But Vera, my lily, my pearl, my saint!——'

In Poland the slow cold spring was leaden-footed and grey of hue.

In the desolate plains that stretched around Szarisla the country slowly grew green with the verdure of budding corn and the yellow river outspread its banks, turbulent and swollen with the melted snows.

She knew what it was to be alive, yet not to live. If it had not been for the long gallops over the plains through the cold air which she forced herself to take for hours every day, she would scarcely have known she was even alive. Little by little as time went on and the household found that she remained there, and that her husband never visited her, the impression gained on all the people that she had been sent there either as captive or as mad; and a certain fear crept into them, and a certain dislike to be alone with her, and timidity when she spoke, came upon them. She saw that shrinking from her, and understood what their fancy about her was. It did not matter, she thought, only it hurt her when the little children began to grow afraid too, and flee from her.

'I suppose I am mad,' she thought, with a weary smile. 'The world would say so, too; I ought to go back to it and kiss Jeanne de Sonnaz on both cheeks.'

But to do so never occurred to her for one moment as any temptation.

She was made to break, perhaps, but never to bend.

One day in the misty spring weather, which seemed to her more trying than all the ice and snow of winter, there came over the plains, now bright with springing grasses or growing wheat, a troika, with hired horses, that was pulled up before the iron-bound doors of Szarisla.

From it there descended a very lovely woman, with an impertinent, delicate profile, radiant, audacious eyes, and a look that had the challenge of the stag with the malice of the marmoset.

When the servants on guard opposed her entrance with the habitual formula, 'The Prince forbids it,' she thrust into their faces a card signed Sergius Zouroff.

On the card was written, 'Admit to Szarisla the Duchess of Mull.'

The servants bowed to the ground, and ushered the bearer of that irresistible order into the presence of their mistress, without preparation or permission.

Vere was sitting at a great oak table in one of the high embrasured windows; the dog was at her feet; some Greek books were open before her; the white woollen gown she wore fell from her throat to her feet, like the robe of a nun; she had no ornament except her thick, golden hair coiled loosely about her head.

Before she realised that she was not alone her cousin's wife stood before her, brilliant in colour as an enamel of Petitot, or a Saxe figure of Kaendler; radiant with health, with contentment, with animation, with the satisfaction with all existent things, which is the most durable, though not the most delicate, form of human happiness. Vere rose to her feet, cold, silent, annoyed, angered; she was in her own house, at least her own since it was her husband's; she could say nothing that was

discourteous; she would say nothing that was welcome. She was astonished and stood mute, looking down from the height of her noble stature on this brilliantly-tinted, porcelain-like figure. For the only time in all her life she who was Pick-me-up in the world of fashion was made nervous and held mute.

She was impudent, daring, clever, vain, and always successful; yet, for the moment, she felt like a frightened child, like a chidden dog, before the amazed cold rebuke of those grand, grey eyes that she had once envied to the girl Vere Herbert.

'Well! you don't seem to like the look of me,' she said at last, and there was a nervous quiver in her high, thin voice. 'You can't be said to look pleased no-way, and yet I've come all this way only just to see you; there aren't many of the others would do as much.'

'You have come to triumph over me!' thought her hearer, but, with the stately old-world courtesy that was habitual to her, she motioned to her cousin's wife to be seated near her and said, coldly:

'You are very good; I regret that Szarisla can offer you little recompense for so long a journey. My cousin is well?'

'Frank's first rate, and the child too,' said Fuschia, Duchess of Mull, with a severe effort to recover the usual lightheartedness, with which she faced all things and all subjects, human and divine. 'I called the boy after you, you know, but you never took any notice. Goodness! if it's not like a convent here; it's a sort of Bastille, isn't it, and the windows are all barred up, and I thought they'd never have let me in; if I hadn't had your husband's order they never would have done till the day of doom; it's very hard on you.'

'My husband sent you here?' said Vere, with her teeth closed; she felt powerless before a studied insult.

'Sent me? My, no! I don't do things for people's sending,' said the young duchess, with some asperity, and her natural courage reviving in her. 'We were bound to come to Berlin, because of Ronald Herbert's marriage;

he is marrying a Prussian princess—didn't you know of that? Doesn't your husband forward you on your letters? And I said to myself when I'm as near as that, I will go on to Poland and see *her*, so I got that order out of your husband; he didn't like it, but he couldn't say no very well anyhow; we saw him as we came through Paris.'

'You were very good to take so much trouble,' said Vere, but her eyes said otherwise. Her eyes said, 'Why do you come to offend me in my solitude and insult me in my captivity?'

But in truth her visitor was innocent of any such thought. Human motives are not unmixed, and in the brilliant young duchess there had been an innocent vanity—a half-conscious conceit—in showing this high-born and high-bred woman, who had always disdained her, that she was above revenge and capable of a noble action. But beyond all vanity and conceit were the wish to make Vere care for her, the indignation at tyranny of a spirited temper, and the loyal impulse to

stand by what she knew was stainless and aspersed.

Fuschia Mull, having once recovered her power of speech, was not silenced soon again. She had seated herself opposite the high window, her bright eyes studied the face of Vere with a curiosity tempered by respect and heightened by wonder; she could flirt with princes and jest with sovereigns, and carry her head high in the great world with all the insolence of a born coquette and a born revolutionary, and since the day when she had become a duchess she had never ceased to assert herself in all the prominence and all the audacity that distinguished her; yet before this lonely woman she felt shy and afraid.

'You aren't a bit glad to see me,' she said, with a little tremour in her words, that flowed fast from the sheer habit of loquacity. 'You never would take to me. No; I know. You've never forgiven me about that coal, nor for my marrying your cousin. Well, that's natural enough; I don't bear malice. There wasn't any cause you should like me, though I think

you'd like the baby if you saw him; he's a real true Herbert, but that's neither here nor there. I wanted to see you because you know they say such things in Paris and London, and all the others are such poor dawdles; they'll never do anything. Even Frank himself says I shouldn't interfere between husband and wife; but people always say you shouldn't interfere when they only mean you may do yourself a mischief, and I never was one to be afraid——'

She paused a moment, and her bright eyes roamed over the dark oak panelled monastic chamber, with its carpet of lambs' skins, and beyond its casements the flat and dreary plains and the low woods of endless firs.

'My!' she said, with a little shiver, 'if it aren't worse than a clearin' down West! Well, he's a brute, anyhow ——'

Vere looked at her with a regard that stopped her.

'It is my own choice,' she said, coldly.

'Yes! I know it is your own choice in a way,' returned the other with vivacity;

'that is what I wanted to say to you. I told Frank the other day in Berlin, "She never liked me, and there wasn't any particular reason why she should; but I always did like her, and I don't mean to stand still and see her put upon." You don't mind my speaking so?—you *are* put upon because you are just too good for this world, my dear. Don't look at me so with your terrible eyes; I don't mean any offence. You know they say all sorts of things in society, and some say one thing and some another; but I believe as how the real fact is this, isn't it? Your husband has sent you here because you would not receive Madame de Sonnaz?'

'That is the fact—yes.'

'Well, you are quite right. I only know if the duke—but never mind that. You know, or perhaps you don't know, that in the world they say another thing than that; they say Prince Zouroff is jealous of that beautiful creature, Corrèze ——'

'I must request that you do not say that to me.'

'Well, they say it in your absence, *some.* I thought I'd better tell you. That Sonnaz woman is a bad lot; poisonous as snakes in a swamp *she* is, and of course she bruits it abroad. I cannot make out what your husband drives at; 'guess he wants you to divorce him; but it aren't him so much as it's that snake. Men are always what some woman or other makes them. Now you know this is what I came to say. I know you don't like me, but I *am* the wife of the head of your father's house, and nothing can change that now, and in the world I'm some pumpkins—I mean they think a good deal of me. Now what I come to ask you is this, and the duke says it with me with all his heart. We want you to come and live with us at Castle Herbert, or in London, or wherever we are. It will shut people's mouths. It will nonsuit your husband, and you shall never see that hussy of the Faubourg in *my* house, that I promise you. Will you do it? Will you? Folks mind *me*, and when I say to them the Princess Zouroff stays with me because her

husband outrages her, the world will know it's a fact. That's so.'

She ceased, and awaited the effect of her words anxiously and even nervously; she meant with all sincerity all she said.

Into Vere's colourless face a warmth came; she felt angered, yet she was touched to the quick. She could not endure the pity, the protection; yet the honesty, and the hospitality, and the frank kindness moved her to emotion.

None of her own friends, none of those who had been her debtor for many an act of kindness or hour of pleasure, had ever thought to come to her in her exile; and the journey was one long and tedious, involving discomfort and self-sacrifice, and yet had had no terrors for this woman, whose vulgarities she had always treated with disdain, whose existence she had always ignored, whose rank she had always refused to acknowledge.

'You aren't angry?' said the other, humbly.

'Angry? Oh, no; you have been very good.'

'Then you will come with us? Say! Your cousin will be as glad as I.'

She was silent.

'Do come!' urged the other with wistful eagerness. 'We are going straight home. Come with us. Of course your mother ought to be the one, but then she's ——; it's no use thinking of her, and, besides, they wouldn't believe her; they'll believe me. I don't lie. And you know I'm an honest woman. I mean to be honest all my days. I flirt, to be sure, but, Lord, what's that. I'd never do what my boy would be sorry I had done, when he grows big enough to know. You needn't be afraid of me. I aren't like you. I never shall be. There is something in the old countries,—but I'll be true to you, true as steel. Americans aren't mean!'

She paused once more, half afraid, in all her omnipotent vanity, of the answer she might receive.

Vere was still silent. The great pride natural to her was at war with the justice and generosity that were no less her nature. She

was humiliated; yet she was deeply moved. This woman, whom she had always despised, had given her back kindness for unkindness, honour for scorn.

With a frank and gracious gesture she rose and put out her hand to her cousin's wife.

'I thank you. I cannot accept your offer, but I thank you none the less. You revenge yourself very nobly; you rebuke me very generously. I see that in the past I did you wrong. I beg your pardon.'

Into the radiant, bold eyes of Fuschia Mull a cloud of sudden tears floated.

She burst out crying.

When she went away from Szarisla in the twilight of the sultry day she had failed to persuade Vere, yet she had had a victory.

'You are a saint!' she said, passionately, as she stood on the threshold of Vere's prison-house. 'You are a saint, and I shall tell all the world so. Will you give me some little thing of your own just to take home to my boy from you? I shall have a kind of fancy

as it will bring him a blessing. It's nonsense maybe, but still —— '

Vere gave her a silver cross.

The long, empty, colourless days went by in that terrible monotony which is a blank in all after remembrance of it. Since the footsteps of Corrèze had passed away over the snow a silence like death seemed to reign round her. She noticed little that was around her; she scarcely kept any count of the flight of time; it seemed to her that she had died when she had sent him from her to the world—the world that she would never revisit. For she knew her husband too well not to know that he would never change in the thing he demanded, and to purchase freedom by the humiliation of public tribunals was impossible to a woman reared, in her childhood, to the austere tenets of an uncompromising honour, an unyielding pride.

'I can live and die here,' she mused often. 'But I will never meet his mistress as my friend, and I will never sue for a divorce.'

When Sergius Zouroff from time to time wrote her brief words bidding her reconsider

her choice she did not consider for a moment; she tore up his message.

The worst bitterness of life had passed her when she had bidden Corrèze depart from her. After that, all seemed so easy, so trivial, so slight and poor.

If her husband had sent her into poverty and made her work with her hands for her bread, it would have seemed no matter to her. As the summer came, parching, dusty, unhealthy, after the bitterness of the cold and the dampness of the rainy season, her attendants grew vaguely alarmed, she looked so thin, so tall, so shadowy her eyes had such heavy darkness under them, and she slept so little. As for the world, it had already almost forgotten her; she was beautiful but strange; she had always been strange, society said, and she chose to live in Poland.

She thought of society now and then, of all that hurry and fever, all that fuss and fume of precedence, all that insatiable appetite for new things, all that frantic and futile effort at distraction, all that stew of calumny and

envy and conflict and detraction which together make up the great world; and it all seemed to her as far away as the noise of a village fair in the valley seems to the climber who stands on a mountain height. Was it only one year ago that she had been in it?—it seemed to her as if centuries had passed over her head, since the gates of Szarisla had closed behind her, and its plains and its pinewoods had parted her from the world.

Even still the isolation was precious to her. She accepted it with gratitude and humility.

'If I were seeing him daily in the life of Paris,' she thought, 'who can tell—I might fall into concealment, deception, falsehood—I might be no stronger than other women, I might learn to despise myself.'

And the gloom and the stillness and the lonely unlovely landscapes, and the long empty joyless days were all welcome to her; they saved her from herself. Her loveliness was unseen, her youth was wasting, her portion was solitude, but she did not complain. Since she had accepted this fate she did not murmur at

it. Her women wondered at her patience as the exiled court of exiled sovereigns often wonder at their rulers' fortitude.

One day at the close of the month of May, she sat by herself in the long low room, which served her as her chief habitation. She had come in from her ride over the level lands, and was tired; she was very often tired now; a dull slight rain was veiling the horizon always dreary at its best; the sky was grey, the air was heavy with mist.

It was summertime, and all the plains were green with grass and grain, but it was summer without colour and without warmth, dreary and chilly: it was seven o'clock; the sun was setting behind a mass of vapour; she thought of Paris at that hour at that season; with the homeward rolling tide of carriages, with the noise, the laughter, the gaiety; with the light beginning to sparkle everywhere before the daylight had faded, with music on the air, and the scent of the lilacs, and the last glow of the sun shining on the ruined Tuileries. Had she ever been there with the crowds looking after her as her horses went

down the Champs Elysées?—it seemed impossible. It seemed so far away.

By the papers that came to her she knew that Corrèze was still there; there in the city that loved him, where his glance was seduction, and his hours were filled with victories; she knew that he was there, she read of the little château at Marly, she comprehended why he chose to live so, in the full light of publicity, for her sake. She thought of him this evening, in that dull grey light which spread like a veil over the mournful plains of Poland. Would he not forget as the world forgot her? why not? She had no pride for him.

At that moment as the day declined, a servant brought her letters.

Letters came to Szarisla but twice in the week fetched by a horseman from the little town. The first letter she took out of the leather sack was from her husband. It was very brief. It said merely:

'Paul de Sonnaz died suddenly last week. If you will consent to pay a visit of ceremony and respect to his wife in her retirement at

Ruilhières, I shall welcome you to Paris with pleasure. If not, if you still choose to disobey me and insult me, you must remain at Szarisla, which I regret to hear from Ivan does not appear to suit your health.'

There was nothing more except his signature.

The letter was the result of the promise he had given to his sister. Vere tore it in two.

The next she opened was a long and tender one from Nadine Nelaguine urging deference to his wishes, and advising concession on this point of a mere visit of condolence to Ruilhières, with all the arguments that tact and affection and unscrupulousness could together supply to the writer.

The next three or four were unimportant, the last was a packet addressed in a hand unknown to her.

She opened it without attention.

Out of the cover fell three letters in her mother's handwriting.

Wondering and aroused, she read them. They were letters ten years old. Letters of her

mother to Sergius Zouroff; letters forgotten when others were burned the week before his marriage; forgotten and left in the tortoise-shell casket.

At ten o'clock on the following night as Prince Zouroff sat at dinner in the Grand Circle a telegram was brought to him. It was from his wife.

'Never approach me: let me live and die here.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SZARISLA had hidden many sad and many tragic lives.

It hid that of Vere.

To her husband she had perished as utterly as though she was dead. From remote districts of the north, news travels slowly; never travels at all, unless it be expressly sent; Vere had so seldom written to anyone that it scarcely seemed strange that she now never wrote at all. The world had almost ceased to inquire for her; it thought she had withdrawn herself into retirement from religious caprice, or from morbid sentiment, or from an unreturned passion, or that she had been sent into that exile

for some fault; whenever women spoke of her they preferred to think this, they revived old rumours. For the rest, silence covered her life.

Her sister-in-law wept honest tears, reviled her brother with honest rage, but then played musical intricacies, or gambled at bezique, and tried to forget that the one creature her cynical heart yearned over, and sighed for, was away in that drear captivity in the Polish plains.

'If I went and lived with her,' thought Nadine Nelaguine, 'I should do her no good, I should not change her: she is *taillée dans le marbre*, I should alter her in nothing, and I should only be miserable myself.'

In country houses of England and Scotland her mother went about through summer and autumn unchanged, charming, popular, and said with a little smile and a sigh, 'Oh! my dear child—you know she is too good—really too good—wastes all her life in Poland to teach the children and convert the Nihilists; she is happiest so she assures me; you know she was always so terribly serious; it was Bulmer that ruined her!'

And she believed what she said.

Jeanne de Sonnaz mourned at Ruilhières in the austere severity of a great lady's widowhood in France, heard mass every day with her little blonde and brown-headed girls and boys about her in solemn retreat, yet kept her keen glance on the world, which she had quitted perforce for a space, and said to herself, annoyed and baffled, 'When will he cease to live at Marly?'

For Corrèze was always there.

Sergius Zouroff had been to Russia. He only went to Livadia, but the world thought he had been to his wife. He returned, and kept open house, at a superb *chasse* he had bought in the Ardennes. When people asked him for his wife, he answered them briefly that she was well; she preferred the north.

Félicité was closed.

The old peasant stood by her wall of furze and looked in vain along the field paths under the apple-blossoms.

'Now the lark is dead,' she said to her son, 'neither of the two comes near.'

So the months fled away.

When the autumn was ended, Corrèze, who was always at his little château with other artists about him, said to himself, 'Have I not done enough for obedience and honour? I must see her, though she shall never see me.'

Corrèze lived his life in the world obedient to her will, but men and women went by him like shadows, and even his art ceased to have power over him.

He was a supreme artist still, since to the genius in him there was added the culture of years, and the facility of long habit. But the joy of the artist was dead in him.

All his heart, all his soul, all his passion, were with that lonely life in the grey plains of Poland, whose youth was passing in solitude, and whose innocence was being slandered by the guilty.

'I obey her;' he thought, 'and what is the use? Our lives will go by like a dream, and we shall be divided even in our graves, the world will always think she has some sin—she lives apart from her husband!'

He chafed bitterly at his doom; he grew

feverish and nervous; he fancied in every smile there was a mockery of her, in every word a calumny; once he took up a public print which spoke of himself and of his retreat at Marly, and which with a hint and a veiled jest, quoted that line which Jeanne de Sonnaz had by a laugh wafted through Paris after his name.

Pur amant sur terre égaré !

Corrèze crushed the paper in his hand, and threw it from him and went out: he longed to do something, to act in some way, all the impetuosity and ardour of his temper were panting to break from this thraldom of silence and inaction.

He would have struck Sergius Zouroff on the cheek in the sight of all Paris, but he had no title to defend her.

He would only harm her more.

She was the wife of Zouroff, and she accepted her exile at her husband's hands; he had no title to resent for her what she would not resent for herself.

'I am not her lover,' he thought bitterly;

'I am nothing but a man who loves her hopelessly, uselessly, vainly.'

It was late in autumn, and ghastly fancies seized him, vague terrors for her, that left him no sleep and no rest, began to visit him. Was she really at Szarisla? Was she indeed living? He could not tell. There were disturbances and bloodshed in the disaffected provinces; winter had begun there in Poland, the long, black silence of winter, which could cover so many nameless graves; he could bear absence, ignorance, apprehension no longer; he went to sing twenty nights in Vienna, and ten in Moscow.

'There I shall breathe the same air,' he thought.

He went over the Alps, by way of the Jura and Dauphiné; he thought as he passed the peaceful valleys and the snow-covered summits that had been so familiar in childhood to him:

'If I could only dwell in the mountains with her, and let the world and fame go by!'

Then he reproached himself for even such dishonour to her as lay in such a thought.

'What am I that she should be mine?' he

mused. 'I have been the lover of many women, I am not worthy to touch her hand. The world could not harm her—would I?'

In Vienna he had brilliant successes. He thought the people mad. To himself he seemed for ever useless, and powerless for art, his voice sounded in his ears like a bell muffled and out of tune. The cities rejoiced over him and feasted and honoured him; but it seemed to him all like a dream; he seemed only to hear the beating of his own heart that he wished would break and be at peace for ever.

From Moscow he passed away, under public plea that he was bound for Germany, towards those obscure, dull, unvisited plains, that lie towards the borders of East Prussia and the Baltic sea, and have scarce a traveller to notice them, and never a poet or historian to save them from the nations' oblivion, but lie in the teeth of the north wind, vast, ill-populated, melancholy, with the profound unchangeable wretchedness of a captive people.

Once more he saw the wide grey plains that stretched around Szarisla.

For days and weeks he lingered on in the miserable village which alone afforded him a roof and bed; he passed there as a stranger from the south buying furs; he waited and waited in the pinewoods merely to see her face. 'If I can see her once drive by me, and she is well, I will go away,' he said to himself, and he watched and waited. But she never came.

At length he spoke of her to the archimandrite of the village, as a traveller might of a great princess of whom hearsay had told him. He learned that she was unwell, and rarely left the house.

Corrèze, as he heard, felt his heart numb with fear, as all nature was numbed with frost around him.

He could not bring himself to leave. The village population began to speak with wonder and curiosity of him; he had bought all the fur they had to sell, and sent them through into Silesia; they knew he was no trader, for he never bargained, and poured out his roubles like sand; they began to speak of him, and wonder at him, and he knew that it was needful he should go.

But he could not; he lived in wretchedness, with scarcely any of the necessaries, and none of the comforts of life, in the only place that sheltered travellers, but from that cabin, he could see the stone walls of her prison-house across the white sea of the snow-covered plains; it was enough. The spot was dearer to him than the gay, delirious pleasures of his own Paris. In the world wherever he chose to go, he would have luxury, welcome, amusement, the rapture of crowds, the envy of men, the love of women, all the charm that success and art and fame can lend to life at its zenith. But he stayed on at Szarisla for sake of seeing those pale stern walls that rose up from the sea of snow.

Those walls enclosed her life.

The snow had ceased to fall, the frost had set in, in its full intensity; one day the sun poured through the heavy vapours of the cloud-covered sky.

He went nearer the building than he had ever done. He thought it possible the gleam of the sun might tempt her to the open air.

He stood without the gates and looked; the front of the great sombre pile seemed to frown,

the casements had iron stanchions; the doors were like the doors of a prison.

'And that brute has shut her here!' he thought, 'shut her here while he sups with Casse une-Croûte!'

Suddenly he seemed to himself to be a coward, because he did not strike Sergius Zouroff, and shame him before the world.

'I have no right,' he thought. 'But does a man want one when a woman is wronged?'

He stood in the shadow of some great Siberian pines, a century old, and looked 'his heart out through his eyes.'

As he stood there, one person and then another, and then another, came up and stood there, until they gathered in a little crowd; he asked, in their own tongue, of one of them why they came; they were all poor; the man who was a cripple said to him: 'The Princess used to come to us while she could; now she is ill we come to her; she is strong enough sometimes to let us see her face, touch her hand; the sun is out; perhaps she will appear to-day; twice a week the charities are given.'

Corrèze cast his furs close about him, so that his face was not seen, and stood in the shadow of the great gateway.

The doors of the building opened; for a moment he could see nothing; his eyes were blind with the intensity of his desire and his fear.

When the mist passed from his sight he saw a tall and slender form, moving with the grace that he knew so well, but very wearily and very slowly, come out from the great doors, and through the gates; the throng of cripples and sufferers and poor of all sorts fell on their knees and blessed her.

He kneeled with them, but he could not move his lips to any blessing; with all the might of his anguish he cursed Sergius Zouroff.

Vere's voice, much weakened, but grave and clear as of old, came to his ear through the rarified air.

'My people, do not kneel to me; you know it pains me. It is long since I saw you; what can I do?'

She spoke feebly; she leaned on a tall cane she bore, and as she moved the thick veil

from about her head, the man who would have given his life for hers saw that she was changed and aged as if by the passing of many years. He stifled a cry that rose to his lips, and stood and gazed on her.

The poor had long tales of woe; she listened patiently, and moved from one to another, saying a few words to each; behind her were her women, who gave alms to each as she directed them. She seemed to have little strength; after a time she stood still, leaning on her cane, and the people grouped about her, and kissed the furs she wore.

Corrèze went forward timidly and with hesitation, and kneeled by her, and touched with his lips the hem of the clothes.

'What do you wish?' she said to him, seeing in him only a stranger, for his face was hidden; then as she looked at him a tremor ran through her; she started, and quivered a little.

'Who are you?' she said quickly and faintly; and before he could answer muttered to him, 'Is this how you keep your word?—you are cruel!'

'For the love of God let me see you alone, let me speak one word,' he murmured, as he still kneeled on the frozen snow. 'You are suffering? you are ill?'

She moved a little away, apart from the people who only saw in him the traveller they knew, and thought he sought some succour from the mistress of Szarisla. He followed her.

'You promised——' she said wearily, and then her voice sank.

'I promised,' he murmured, 'and I had not strength to keep it; I will go away now that I have seen you. But you are ill, this country kills you, your people say so; it is you who are cruel.'

He could scarcely see her in the veils, and the heavy fur-lined robes that screened her from the cold; he could only see the delicate cheeks grown thin and wan, and the lustrous eyes that were so weary and so large.

'I am not ill; I am only weak,' she said, while her voice came with effort. 'Oh, why did you come? It was cruel!'

She dropped her hood over her face; he

heard her weeping—it was the first time he had ever seen her self-control broken.

'Why cruel?' he murmured. 'Dear God! how can I bear it? You suffer; you suffer in health as well as in mind. What do you do with your life?—is it to perish here, buried in the snow like a frozen dove's? He is a brute beast; what need to obey him? what need to be faithful——?'

'Hush—hush! there has been sin enough to expiate. Let me live and die here. Go—go—go!'

Corrèze was silent. He gazed at her and loved her as he had never loved her or any other; and yet knew well that she was right. Nay, he thought almost better could he bear the endless night of perpetual separation than be the tempter to lead that fair life down into the devious ways of hidden intrigue, or out into the bald and garish glare of open adultery.

'O my love, my empress, my saint!' he murmured, as all his soul that yearned for her gazed from his aching eyes. 'Long ago I said cursed be those who bring you the knowledge

of evil. Others have brought it you; I will not bring more. I love you; yes; what of that? I have sung of love all my days, and I have sworn it to many, and I have been its slave often, too often; but my love for you is as unlike those passions as you are unlike the world. Yet you ask me to leave you here in the darkness of these ghastly winters; in the midst of an alien people that curse the name you bear; alone amidst every peril, surrounded by traitors and spies? Ask me any other thing; not that!'

'It must be that,' she said; her voice was below her breath, but it was firm.

'No, no—not that, not that!' he cried passionately; 'any other thing; not that! Let me stay where I see the roof that shelters you. Let me stay where I breathe the same air as you breathe. Let me stay where, from a distance in the forests, I can watch your horses go by and see the golden gleam of your hair on the mists; I will perish to the world; I will be dead to men; I will come and live here as a hunter or a woodcutter, as a tiller of the fields

—what you will; but let me live where I know all that befalls you, where I can be beside you if you need me, where I can kiss the wind as it blows, because in its course it touched your cheek——'

In all the strength of his passion, in all the melody of his voice, the eloquence that was as natural to him as song to a bird poured itself out in that prayer. Only to dwell near her—never to touch her hand, never to meet her eyes, but to be near her where she dwelt, in this land of frost, of silence, of darkness, of danger, of sorrow—that was all he asked. And all the tenderness that was in her, all the youth, all the womanhood, all the need of sympathy and affection that were in her longed to grant his prayer.

To have him remain within call; to feel that in that dark, lone, wintry desert his heart was beating and his courage was watching near her; to think that when the chill stars shone out of the midnight clouds they would shine on some lonely forest cabin where this one creature who loved her would be living in obscurity for her

sake;—this was so sweet a thought she dared not look at it, lest her force should fail her. She gathered all her strength. She remembered all that his life was to him—so gay, so great, so full of love, and honour, and triumph,—would she be so weak, so wicked, in her selfishness as to take him from the world for her, to be his living grave, to make him bankrupt in genius, in art, in fame?

She thrust the temptation from her as though it were a coiling snake.

'You mean the thing you say,' she murmured faintly. 'Yes; and I am grateful; but all that can never be. All you can do for me is—to leave me.'

'How can I leave you—leave you to die alone? What need—what use is there in such a waste of life? No! what you bid me do, I do. I will keep the word I gave you; if you tell me to go, I go, but for the pity of heaven, think first what it is you ask; think a little of what I suffer.'

'Have I not thought?'

She put her hands out feebly towards him.

'If you love me indeed, leave me; there is sin enough, shame enough, spare me more. If indeed you love me, be my good angel—not my tempter!'

He was pierced to the heart; he, the lover of so many women, knew well that moment in the lives of all women who love, and are loved, when they sink in a trance of ecstasy and pain, and yield without scarce knowing that they yield, and are as easily drawn downward to their doom as a boat into the whirlpool. He saw that this moment had come to her, as it comes to every woman into whose life has entered love. He saw that he might be the master of her fate and her.

For an instant the temptation seized him, like a flame that wrapped him in its fire from head to foot. But the appeal to his strength and to his pity called to him from out that mist and heat of passion and desire. All that was generous, that was chivalrous, that was heroic, in him, answered to the cry. All at once it seemed to him base—base, with the lowest sort of cowardice—to try and drag the pure and lofty spirit to

earth, to try and make her one with the women she abhorred. He took her hands, and pressed them close against his aching heart.

'Better angels than I should be with you,' he murmured; 'but at least I will try and save you from devils. No man's love is fit for you. I will go, and I will never return.'

He stooped, and with tremulous lips touched her hands; then once more he left her, and went away over the frozen snow.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WITHOUT pause Corrèze travelled straight to Paris.

He reached there late, and had barely time to dress and pass on to the stage.

It was the opera of 'Romeo and Giulietta.'

He knew its music as a child knows its cradle-song.

He played, acted, and sang, from one end to the other of the long acts perfectly, but without any consciousness of what he did.

'I am the mechanical nightingale,' he thought, bitterly: the crowded opera-house swam before his eyes.

'Are you ill, Corrèze?' murmured the great songstress, who was his Juliet.

'I am cold,' he answered her. It seemed to him as if the cold of those bitter plains, which were the prison of Vere, and might be her tomb, had entered his blood and frozen his very heart.

When he went to his carriage the streets were lined with the throngs of a city that loved him. They pressed to see him, they shouted his name, they flung bouquets of flowers on to him; he was their Roi Soleil, their prince of song. He wondered was he mad, or were they? His voice felt strangled in his throat; he saw nothing of the lighted streets and the joyous multitudes, he saw only the piteous eyes of the woman he loved as she had said to him—

'Be my angel, not my tempter!'

'I cannot be her angel,' he said to himself. 'But I will try and save her from devils.'

In all his life before he had never been at a loss. He had never known before what doubt meant, or

> What hell it is in waiting to abide.

His victories had all been facile, his love

had all been swift and smooth, his career had been a *via triumphalis* without shadow, he had been happy always, he had had romance in his life, but no grief, no loss, no regret; he had been the spoiled child of fate and of the world.

Now the fatal tenderness, the unavailing regret, which had been no darker than a summer cloud when he had passed away from the shores of Calvados, leaving the child, Vere Herbert, in her mother's hands, had now spread over all his present and hung over all the horizon of his future in a sunless gloom that nothing would ever break or lighten.

And he was powerless!

If he could have acted in any way he would have been consoled. The elasticity and valour of his temperament would have leapt up to action like a bright sword from the scabbard. But he could do nothing. The woman he adored might perish slowly of those nameless maladies which kill the body through the mind; and he could do nothing.

He would not tempt her, and he could not avenge her.

He who knew the world so intimately, who had seen a million times a laugh, a hint, a word, destroy the honour of a name, knew well that he would but harm her more by any defence of her innocence, any protest against the tyranny of her husband.

Though he gave his life to defend her fair fame, the world would only laugh.

He drove through the brilliant streets of Paris at midnight, and shut his eyes to the familiar scenes with a heartsick weariness of pain. He loved *cette bonne ville de Paris*, which had smiled on him, played with him, pampered with him, as a mother her favourite child; which always lamented his departure when he left it, which always welcomed him with acclamation when he returned. He loved it with affection, with habit, with the strength of a thousand memories of his glory, of his pleasure, of his youth; yet as he drove through it, almost he cursed it; Paris sheltered the vices of Sergius Zouroff, and worshipped his wealth.

He entered the club of the Grand Circle after the opera. He wished to gather tidings

of the husband of Vere and of what the world said of her in her exile.

In one of the rooms Zouroff was seated, his hat was on the table beside him; he was speaking with the Marquis de Merilhac. As Corrèze entered, Zouroff rose and put his hat on his head. 'Let us go to a club where there are no comedians,' he said in a loud voice to Hervé de Merilhac, and went out. It was an insolence with intention; in the Ganaches men keep their heads uncovered.

All who were present looked at Corrèze. He took no notice. He spoke to his own acquaintances; the insult had no power to move him since he had so long kept his arm motionless, and his lips mute, for her sake.

Some men who knew him well and were curious, made a vague apology for the Russian Prince.

'He is jealous,' they added, with a little fatuous laugh. 'You come from Poland!'

'I have sung in Moscow and Warsaw,' said Corrèze, with an accent that warned them not to pursue the theme. 'And it is true,' he added,

with a grave coldness that had its weight from one so careless, so gay, and so facile of temper as he was. 'It is true that in a part of Poland the Princess Vera Zouroff does live on one of her husband's estates, devoting herself to the poor because she prefers solitude and exile to receiving as her friend the widow of Paul de Sonnaz, the sister of Hervé de Merilhac.'

For the moment, such is the immediate force of truth, no one laughed. There was the silence of respect.

Then they spoke of his return, of the opera that night, of his stay in Vienna, of all the topics of the hour then occupying the scarcely-opened salons of Paris. No man in the Ganaches was bold enough to speak again in his presence of Princess Zouroff.

'Why did you insult Corrèze?' said the Marquis de Merilhac, as Zouroff passed on with him to the Rue Scribe.

'I do not choose to be in the same club with a singer,' answered Zouroff, with rough impatience.

'But he belongs to half the great clubs of Europe.'

'Then I will insult him in half of them! You may have heard, *il fait la cour à ma femme.*'

'Jeanne told me something at Félicité,' said Hervé de Merilhac. 'But she said it was only romance.'

'Romance! Faust or Edgardo! or, as in a Renaissance dress, he is adored by Leonora! *Merci bien!* I am not jealous, I am not unreasonable; I know the destinies of husbands. But I do not accept a rival in the satin and tinsel of the stage! Half a century ago,' added Zouroff, as he turned in at the doors of the Jockey Club, 'one could have had this man beaten by one's lackeys. Now one is obliged to meet him at one's *cercle* and insult him as though he were a noble.'

'He is one,' said the Marquis de Merilhac, who was perplexed and dissatisfied.

'Faugh!' said Zouroff, with the scorn of a great prince.

The next morning, as Corrèze passed through the gardens of the Tuileries, he chanced to see the small, spare form of the Princesse Nela-

guine; she was seated on a bench in the sunshine of the wintry morning, watching the little children of her eldest son float their boats upon one of the basins. He paused, hesitated, saluted her, and approached. Madame Nelaguine smiled on him.

'Why not?' she thought, 'there is nothing true; even were it true she would be justified.'

Corrèze spoke to her with the compliment of daily life, which he, better than most men, could divest of the commonplace and invest with grace and dignity. Then abruptly he said to her, 'Princesse, I was coming to you this morning; I have been to Szarisla——'

She started, and looked at him in surprise.

'To Szarisla? You have seen—my brother's wife? It is strange you should tell me.'

'I tell you because she is your brother's wife,' answered Corrèze; his face was pale and grave, and his tone was sad and cold, with an accent of rebuke, which her quick ear detected. 'May I speak to you honestly?

I should be your debtor if you would allow me.'

She hesitated; then sent the children and their attendants farther away, and motioned to him to sit beside her.

'I suppose you know what they say,' she said to him; 'my brother would think I did ill to listen to you.'

'In what they say, they lie.'

'The world always lies, or almost always; I think it lies about you, or I should not speak to you. You have been to Szarisla?'

'I have been there; I have seen her for five minutes, no more, though I lived in the village five weeks. Madame, she has death in her face.'

The tears rushed into his hearer's keen, curious eyes, her lips trembled.

'No- no, you exaggerate! Vera dying? You make my heart sick. I have feared for her health always—always—what did you do those five long weeks?'

'I waited to see her face,' said Corrèze simply; 'Madame, listen to me one moment; I

will try not to tire your patience. She is your brother's wife; yes, but she is dealt with as he would never deal with one of his mistresses. Listen; long ago, when she was a child, I met her on a summer morning; I loved her then; call it fancy, caprice, poetry, what you will; her mother gave her, not to me, but to Prince Zouroff. I kept away from her; I would not sing in Russia whilst she was there; I would not approach her in Paris; if I had seen her in peace, seen her even respected, I would have tried to be content, I would for ever have been silent; instead, I have seen her insulted in every way that infidelity can insult a woman ——'

'I know! I know! Spare me that; go on——'

'At last I knew that she was sent into exile; and why? because she would no longer receive Jeanne de Sonnaz.'

'It was a madness to refuse to receive Jeanne de Sonnaz; after all, what did it matter? women meet their rivals, their foes, every hour, and kiss them. It was madness to refuse!'

'It may have been. It was noble, it was

truthful, it was brave, it was befitting the delicacy and the dignity of her nature. For that act, though no one can deny that she is in the right, she is exiled into a land where life is unendurable, even to yourselves, natives of it; where the year is divided between an endless winter and a short, parching season of heat that it is mockery to call the summer; where the only living creatures that surround her are servants who watch and chronicle her simplest action, and peasants, whose God is a dream, and whose homes are hovels. Did your brother wish for her death, or for her insanity, that he chose Szarisla?'

'My brother wishes that she should meet Jeanne de Sonnaz. I am frank with you; be frank with me. Are you the lover of my brother's wife? Paris says so.'

'Madame, that I love her, and shall love no other whilst I live, I do not deny. That I am her lover is a lie, a calumny, a blasphemy, against her.'

Madame Nelaguine was silent; she looked at him with searching, piercing eyes.

'What did you do, then, at Szarisla?'

'I went to see her face, to hear her footsteps, to be sure that she lived. I spoke to her; I laid my soul, my honour, all the service of my life, at her feet, and she rejected them. That is all.'

'All?'

She was once more silent; she was a suspicious woman and a cynical, and often false herself, and never credulous; yet she believed him.

'You have been unwise, imprudent; you should never have gone there,' she said suddenly. 'And she is ill you say?'

'The priest said so; she looks so; she is weak; she is all alone. I should never have gone there? I should have been a coward indeed if I had not; if I had known her so deeply wronged, and had not at least offered her vengeance——'

'Her husband is my brother!'

'It is because he is your brother that I asked the grace of your patience to-day. Madame, remember it is very terrible that at

twenty years old an innocent creature, lovely as the morning, should be confined in exile till she dies of utter weariness, of utter loneliness, of utter hopelessness! Prince Zouroff is within his rights, but none the less is he an assassin. I believe he alleges that she is free to return, but when he couples her return with an unworthy condition that she cannot accept, she is as much his captive as though chains were on her. If she remain there, she will not live, and she will never consent to leave Szarisla, since she can only leave it at the price of affected friendship with the Duchesse de Sonnaz——'

'What would you have me do?' cried his hearer in a sudden agitation very rare with her, in which anger and sorrow strove together; 'what is it you ask? what is it you wish? I do not understand——'

'I wish you to speak to Prince Zouroff.

'Speak to Sergius?'

'In my name, yes; he would not hear me or I would speak myself. Madame, your brother knows very well that his wife is as

innocent as the angels, but it suits him that all the world should suspect her.'

'Then he is a villain!'

'He is under the influence of an unscrupulous woman, that is nearly the same thing. Madame de Sonnaz never forgave his marriage; she now avenges it. Madame, what I wish is that you should speak to your brother as I speak to you. He would not hear me; that is natural. He is her husband, I am nothing; he has the right to refuse to listen to her name from my mouth. But you, he will hear. Tell him what I have told you; tell him that, when the world speaks of me and of her it lies; and tell him—I can think of no better way—that to remove all possibility of suspicion, to put away all semblance of truth from the rumours of society, I myself will die to the world. Why not? I am tired. She will never be mine. Fame is nothing to me. The very music I have adored all my life seems like the mere shaking of dried peas in an empty bladder. I cannot forget one woman's face, a woman who will never be mine. I will leave art and the world of men; I will

go back to the mountains where I was born, and live the life my fathers led; in a season Europe will have forgotten that it had ever an idol called Corrèze. Nay, if that fail to content him, if he doubt that I shall keep my word, I will do more; I will enter one of those retreats where men are alone with their memories and with God. There is the Chartreuse that has sheltered greater men than I and nobler lives than mine. It is all alone amidst the hills; I should be in my native air; I could go there. You stare; do you doubt? I give my word that I will die to the world; I can think of no other way to save her name from mine. If that content him I will do it, if he will bring her back into the honour of the world, and never force her to see Jeanne de Sonnaz. Does it seem so much to you to do? It is nothing; I would die in my body for her, or to do her any good. Thus I shall die, only in name.'

He ceased to speak, and his hearer was silent. There was no sound but the wind blowing through the scorched ruins of the

Tuileries, and scattering on the earth the withered leaves of the trees.

'But what you will do is a martyrdom,' she cried abruptly; 'it is death ten thousand times over! Retreat from the world? you? the world's idol!'

'I would do more for her if I knew what to do.'

She held out her hand to him.

'You are very noble.'

'I will do what I say,' he answered simply.

She was silent, in the silence of a great amaze; the amazement of a selfish and a corrupt nature at one that is unselfish and uncorrupted.

'You are very noble,' she murmured once more, 'and she is worthy of your heroism. Alas! it will be of no use; you do not understand my brother's character, nor what is now moving his mind. You do not see that his desire is, not to save his wife from you, but to force her to divorce him.'

'If he were not your brother——'

'You would curse him as a scoundrel? He

is not that; he is a man, too rich, spoiled by the world, and now dominated by a dangerous woman. I will speak to him; I will tell him what you have said; but I have little hope.'

She gave him her hand again, her eyes were wet. He rose, bowed, and left her. He had done what he could.

At that moment Sergius Zouroff, in the smoking-room of the Ganâches, was reading a little letter that had come to him from the château of Ruilhières. It was very short, it said only, 'Corrèze has returned to Paris; he has been at Szarisla. Do not let his talent, the trained talent of the stage, deceive you.'

Madame Nelaguine an hour later told him of what had been said to her in the gardens of the Tuileries. She spoke with an eloquence she could command at will, with an emotion that was rarely visible in her.

'This man is noble,' she said when she had exhausted all argument and all entreaty, and had won no syllable from him in reply. 'Have you no nobility to answer his? His sacrifice

would be unparalleled, his devotion superb; he will die to the world in the height of his fame, like a king that abdicates in his full glory and youth. Can you not rise for once to his height? Will a prince of our blood be surpassed in generosity by an artist?'

He heard his sister speak in unbroken silence. She was afraid with a great fear. His stormy passions usually spent themselves in rage that was too indolent to act, but his silence was always as terrible as the silence of the frost at midnight in his own plains, when men were dying in the snow.

'You may be the dupe of a comedian's *coup de théâtre*,' was all that he said when she had ended; 'I am not; tell him so.'

Sergius Zouroff knew well when he looked into his own heart that he was doing a base thing; he knew well that Vere was as pure of any earthly sin as any earthly creature can be; he did not believe any one of the daughters of men had ever been so innocent as she, or so faithful to the things she deemed her duty. But he stifled his conscience, and let loose

only the rage which consumed him; half rage against her because she was for ever lost to him, half rage against himself for this other tyranny, which he had allowed to eat into and absorb his life. He was sullen, angered, dissatisfied, a dull remorse was awake in him, and the savage temper which had been always uncontrolled in him, craved for some victim on which to vent itself. His wife he dared not approach. His fury, though never his suspicions, fell upon Corrèze.

'He is not her lover; she is pure as the ice,' he said impatiently to himself. But she was not there, and Corrèze was before his eyes in Paris. A real and sombre hatred grew up in him; for little, for nothing, he would have killed this man as he killed a bird.

Corrèze sang this night at the Grand Opera, according to his engagement.

The opera-house was in a tumult of rapture and homage; flowers rained on him; women wept; Paris the cynical, Paris the mocker, Paris the inconstant, was faithful to him, worshipped him, loved him as poets love, and dogs.

It was the grandest night that even his triumphal life had ever known. It was the last. When the glittering crowds swam before his eyes, and welcomed his return, in his heart he said to them, 'farewell.'

As men doomed to death at dawn look at the sunrise of the last day they will ever see, so he looked at the crowds that hung upon his voice. It was for the last time, he said to himself: to-morrow he would keep the word he had given to Sergius Zouroff and would perish to the world. He would sing no more, save in the matin song, in the cold, white dawns, in the monastery of the mountains above Grenoble.

'She said rightly,' he thought; 'it is so easy to die.'

'But to live so would be hard.'

He would leave the laugh of the world behind him; a few women would mourn their lost lover, and the nations would mourn their lost music, but the memory of nations is short-lived for the absent, and he knew well that for the most part the world would laugh;

laugh at Ruy Blas, who chose to bury his life for a fatal passion in the solitudes of the mountains in days when passion has lost all dignity and solitude all consolation. To the world he would seem but a romantic fool, since in this time there are neither faith nor force, but only a dreary and monotonous triviality that has no fire for hatred and has no soul for sacrifice.

'I can think of nothing else,' he said to himself. He could think of no other way by which he could efface himself from the living world without leaving remorse or calumny upon her name. And to him it was not so terrible as it would have been to others. He had had all the uttermost sweetness and perfection of life, he had drunk deeply of all its intoxications, he was now at the zenith of his triumphs. He thought that it would be better to lay aside the cup still full rather than drain it to the lees. He thought that it would not be so very bitter after all to abdicate, not one half so bitter as to await the waning of triumphs, the decay of strength, the gradual

change from public idolatry to public apathy, which all genius sees that does not perish in its prime. And he had more of the old faiths in him than most men of his generation. He had something of the enthusiast and of the visionary, of Montalembert and of Pascal. It would not be so hard, he thought, to dwell amidst the silence of the mountains, waiting until the Unknown God should reveal by death the mysteries of life. Beyond all and beneath all, as he had often said, he was a mountaineer; he would be a monk amidst the mountains. Let the world laugh.

As the crowd of the Opera House recalled him, and the plaudits that he would never hear again thundered around him, he murmured:

> Je briserai sur mon genou
> Le sceptre avec le diadème
> Comme un enfant casse un joujou,
> Moi-même, en plein règne, au grand jour.

And his eyes were wet as he looked for the last time on the people of Paris and said in his heart—farewell.

As he went away from the theatre, amidst

the shouts of the exulting multitude—waiting as when kings pass through cities that hail them as victors—a note was brought to him. It was from Nadine Nelaguine. It said merely: 'I have spoken to my brother, but it is of no use. He will hear no reason. Leave Paris.'

The face of Corrèze grew dark.

'I will not leave Paris,' he said to himself. He saw in the counsel a warning or a threat. 'I will not leave Paris until I enter the shroud of the monkish habit.'

And he smiled a little wearily, thinking again that when he should have buried himself in the Chartreuse the world would only see in the action a *coup de théâtre*; a fit ending to the histrion who had been so often the Fernando of its lyric triumphs.

He went down the street slowly on foot, the note of Nadine Nelaguine in his hand, his carriage following him filled with the bouquets and wreaths that had covered the stage that night.

He looked up at the stars and thought: 'When I am amidst the snows alone in my

cell, will these nights seem to me like heaven or like hell?'

An old and intimate friend touched his arm and gave him a journal of the evening.

'Have you read this?' said his friend, and pointed to an article signed '*Un qui n'y croit pas.*'

It was one of the wittiest papers that was sold upon the Boulevards; there was a brilliant social study; it was called, '*Les anges terrestres.*'

Under thin disguises it made its sport and jest of the Ice-flower away in Poland, and the Romeo of Paris, who was breaking the hearts of women by an anchorite's coldness.

It had been written by a ready writer in the Rue Meyerbeer, but its biting irony, its merciless raillery, its gay incredulity, its sparkling venom, had been inspired from the retreat of Ruilhières.

Corrèze turned into Bignon's, which he was passing, and read it sitting in the light of the great salon.

It would have hurt him less to have had a score of swords buried in his breast.

'If I avenge her I shall but darken her name more!' he thought, in that agony of impotence which is the bitterest suffering a bold and a fervent temper can ever know.

At that moment Sergius Zouroff entered; he had both men and women with him. Amongst the women were a circus-rider of the Hippodrome, and the quadroon Casse-une-Croûte.

It was midnight.

Corrèze rose to his feet, at a bound, and approached the husband of Vere.

With a movement of his hand he showed him the article he had read.

'Prince Zouroff,' he said, between his teeth. 'Will you chastise this as it merits, or do you leave it to me?'

Zouroff looked at him with a cold stare. He had already seen the paper. For the moment he was silent.

'I say,' repeated Corrèze, still between his teeth. 'Do you avenge the honour of the Princess Zouroff? I ask you in public, that your answer may be public.'

'The honour of the Princess Zouroff!'

echoed her husband, with a loud laugh. '*Mais—c'est à vous, monsieur!*'

Corrèze lifted his hand and struck him on the cheek.

'You are a liar, you are a coward, and you are an adulterer!' he said, in his clear, far-reaching voice, that rang like a bell through the silence of the assembled people; and he struck him three times as he spoke.

CHAPTER XXX.

To Szarisla, in the intense starlit cold of a winter's night, a horseman, in hot-haste, brought a message that had been borne to the nearest city on the electric wires, and sent on by swift riders over many versts of snow and ice.

It was a message from Sergius Zouroff to his wife, and her women took it to her when she lay asleep; the troubled, weary sleep that comes at morning to those whose eyes have not closed all night.

It was but a few words.

It said only: 'I have shot your nightingale in the throat. He will sing no more!'

She read the message.

For a few moments she knew nothing; a great darkness fell upon her and she saw nothing; it passed away, and the native courage and energy of her character came to life after their long paralysis.

She said no word to any living creature. She lay quite still upon her bed, her hand crushed upon the paper. She bade her women leave her, and they did so, though they were frightened at her look, and reluctant.

It was an hour past midnight.

When all was again still she arose, and clothed herself by the light of the burning lamp. No man can suffer from insult as a woman does who is at once proud and innocent. A man can avenge himself at all times, unless he be a poltroon indeed; but to a woman there is no vengeance possible that will not make her seem guiltier in the eyes of others, and more deeply lowered in her own. As Vere rose and bound her hair closely about her head, and clothed herself in the furs that were to shelter her against the frightful frost, all her

veins were on fire with a consuming rage that for the moment almost burnt out the grief that came with it.

She had been made a public sport, a public shame, by her husband, who knew her innocent, and faithful, and in temptation untempted! She had been sacrificed in life, and peace, and name, and fame, to screen the adulterous guilt of another woman! All the courage in her waked up in sudden resurrection; all the haughty strength of her character revived under the unmerited scourge of insult.

They should not dishonour her in her absence. They should not lie without her protest and her presence. He who was also guiltless should not suffer alone. Perhaps already he was dead. She could not tell; she read the message of her husband as meaning death; she said to herself, 'Living, I will console him; dead, I will avenge him.'

She drew the marriage-ring off her hand, and trampled it under her foot as Sergius Zouroff had trodden the Moth and the Star.

There is a time in all patience when it

becomes weakness; a time in all endurance when it becomes cowardice; then with great natures patience breaks and becomes force, endurance rises, and changes into action.

She, proud as great queens are, and blameless as the saints of the ages of faith, had been made the sport of the tongues of the world; and he who had loved her as knights of old loved, in suffering and honour, was dead, or worse than dead.

The fearlessness of her temper leapt to act, as a lightning-flash springs from the storm-cloud to illumine the darkness. 'I am not a coward,' she said with clenched teeth, while her eyes were dry. She prepared for a long and perilous journey. She put on all her fur-lined garments. She took some rolls of gold, and the papers that proved her identity as the wife of Prince Zouroff, and would enable her to pass the frontier into East Prussia. With these, holding the dog by the collar, she took a lamp in her hand and passed through the vast, dark, silent corridors, that were like the streets of a catacomb. There was no one stirring; the house-

hold slept the heavy sleep of brandy-drinkers. No one heard her step down the passages and staircase. She undid noiselessly the bolts and bars of a small side door and went out into the air. It was of a piercing coldness.

It was midwinter and past midnight. The whole landscape was white and frozen. The stars seemed to burn in the steel-hued sky. She went across the stone court to where the stables lay. She would rouse no one, for she knew that they would to a man obey their Prince and refuse to permit her departure without his written order. She went to the stalls of the horses. The grooms were all asleep. She led out the two that she had driven most often since her residence at Szarisla. Her childish training was of use to her now. She harnessed them. They knew her well and were docile to her touch, and she put them into the light, velvet-lined sledge in which she had been used to drive herself through the fir forests and over the plains.

Her feebleness and her feverishness had left her. She felt strong in the intense

strength which comes to women in hours of great mental agony. Her slender hands had the force of a Hercules in them. She had driven so often through all the adjacent lands that the plains were as well known to her as the moors of Bulmer had been to her in her childhood. The sledge and the horses' hoofs made no sound on the frozen snow. She entered the sledge, made the dog lie covered at her feet, and, with a word to the swift young horses, she drove them out of the gates and into the woods, between the aisles of birch and pine. The moonlight was strong; the moon was at the full. The blaze of northern lights made the air clear as day. She knew the road and took it unerringly. She drove all night long. No sense of mortal fear reached her. She seemed to herself frozen as the earth was. The howl of wolves came often on her ears in the ghastly solitude of the unending lines of dwarfish and storm-rift trees. At any moment some famished pack might scent her coming on the air and meet her, or pursue her, and then of her life there would be no more

trace than some blood upon the snow, that fresher snow would in another hour obliterate. But she never thought of that. All she thought of was of the voice which for her was mute for ever.

When in the faint red of the sullen winter's dawn she arrived at the first posting village with her horses drooping and exhausted, the postmaster was afraid to give her other horses to pass onward. She could show him no order from Prince Zouroff, but she had gold with her, and at length induced him to bring out fresh animals, leaving her own with him to be sent back on the morrow to Szarisla. The postmaster was terrified at what he had done, and shuddered at what might be his chastisement; but the gold had dazzled him. He gazed after her as the sledge flew over the white ground against the crimson glow of the daybreak and prayed for her to St. Nicholas.

Driving on and on, never pausing save to change her horses, never stopping either to eat or rest, taking a draught of tea and an atom of

bread here and there at a posthouse, she at length reached the frontiers of East Prussia.

Corrèze lay on his bed in his house at Paris. Crowds, from princes and senators and marshals to workmen and beggars and street-arabs, came and asked for him, and the people stood in the street without, sorrowful and anxious. For the first news they had heard was that he would die; then they were told that the hæmorrhage had ceased, that it was possible he might live, but that he would never sing again.

Paris heard, and wept for its darling—wept yet more for its own lost music.

The days and the weeks went on, and the first emotion and excitement waned with time. Then the Crown-Prince of Germany came into the city; there were feasts, reviews, illuminations. Paris, as she forgot her own wrongs, forgot her mute singer, lying in his darkened room; and the bouquets in his hall were faded and dead. No one left fresh ones. Only some score of poor people, amongst them a blind man and a little ugly girl, hung always,

trembling and sobbing, about his doors, afraid lest their angel should unfold his wings and leave them for the skies.

Corrèze lay in his darkness, dumb.

He had been shot in the throat; he himself had fired in the air.

When he had fallen, with the blood filling his mouth, he had found voice to say to his adversary: 'Your wife is faultless!'

Sergius Zouroff had looked down on him with a cold and fierce contentment.

'I have done you the honour to meet you, but I am not your dupe,' he had said, as he turned away: and yet in his soul he knew—knew as well as that the heavens were above him—that this man, whom he believed to be dying, spoke the truth.

They had met in the garden of the house of Corrèze. They had taken only their seconds with them. It had all been arranged and over by sunrise. Sergius Zouroff had hastened out of the city, and over the frontiers, to make his peace with his sovereign in his own country. Corrèze had been carried into his own house and

laid in his own bedchamber. Their friends, according to the instructions given them previously, had sent to the newspapers of the hour a story of an accident that had occurred in playing with a pistol; but it had been soon suspected that this was but a cover to a hostile account, and rumours of the truth had soon run through Paris, where the scene at Bignon's had been the sensation of the hour.

He lay now in the gloom and silence of his chamber. Sisters of charity were watching him: it was twilight there, though outside in Paris the sun was shining on multitudes of people and divisions of troops as the city flocked to a review in the Champ de Mars.

He could not speak; they would save his life, perhaps, but he knew that they could never save his voice.

As a singer he was dead.

All the joys of his art and all its powers were perished for evermore, all the triumph and the ecstasy of song were finished as a tale that was told; all the fame of his life and its splendour were snapped asunder in their

prime and perfection, as a flower is broken off in full blossom.

'And I did her no good!' he thought; he had lost all and he had done nothing!

He was half delirious; his sight languidly recognised the familiar room about him, and watched the stray lines of sunshine glimmer through the shutters; but his mind was absorbed and full of dull feverish dreams; he thought now of St. Petersburg, with the rain of hot-house flowers on the ice in his nights of triumph, now of the Norman sunshine with the common roses blooming against the fence of furze, now of the bleak snow-plains of Szarisla. All was confused to him and showed like figures in a mist. Sometimes he thought that he was already dead, already in his tomb, and that about him the crowds of Paris were singing his own Noël. Sometimes he thought that he was in hell walking with Dante and with Virgil, and that devils tried to hold him down as he strove to cry aloud to Christ: 'Lord, she is innocent!'

All the while he was mute; he could scarcely breathe, he could not speak.

Unconscious though they thought him, he heard them say around his bed: 'he may speak again, perhaps, but he will never be able to sing a note.'

They thought him deaf as well as dumb. But he heard and understood.

In his fever and his suffering he said always in his heart: 'If only she will think that I did well!'

Then he would grow delirious again and forget, and he fancied that he was called to sing to the people and that his mouth was closed with steel.

The wintry sunshine was brilliant and clear; it was in the afternoon; through the dusk of his room there came the distant sounds of trumpets, and the boom of the cannon of the Invalides. All else was still.

All Paris was interested with the pleasure of a spectacle; the streets were deserted, the houses were emptied, all the city was in the Champ de Mars, and on the cold clear air bursts of distant sounds from clashing cymbals and rolling drums came into the chamber of Corrèze, whom Paris had forgotten.

At the Gare de l'Est with other travellers at that moment, there descended from a sleeping-carriage a woman clothed in furs, and with a dog in a leash beside her.

She walked quickly, and with a haughty movement across the crowded waiting-room; she was alone except for her dog. Her face was very white, her eyes seemed to burn as the stars did in the Polish frost. She was praying with all the might of prayer in her soul.

She might be too late to see him living; too late to tell him that she loved him; she, for whose sake, and in whose defence, he had found death, or worse than death!

All the courage, all the fearlessness, all the generosity, of her soul had leaped up into life and movement; she had ceased to remember herself or the world, she only prayed to heaven, 'Grant him his life! his beautiful life, that is like sunlight upon earth!'

She had come across the middle of Europe in the winter weather, over the snow plains and the frozen rivers, unaided, unaccompanied, making no pause, taking no rest either by

night or day, as she had come through Poland.

She descended into the noise and dirt of the streets; she who had never been a yard on foot, or unattended, in a city. The movement around her seemed to her ghastly and horrible. Could he lie dying, and the city he loved not be still and stricken a moment?

She mingled with the crowds and was soon lost in them, she who had always gone through Paris with pomp and splendour; she at whose loveliness the mob had always turned to look; she who had been the Princess Zouroff.

The day was drawing to its close; the troops were returning, the multitudes were shouting. In his darkened room Corrèze, disturbed and distressed by the sounds, moved wearily and sighed.

The door of his chamber opened and Vere entered.

She threw her furs and coverings off her as she moved and came to the sisters of charity. The lassitude, the weakness, the sickness which had weighed on her, and suffocated her youth in

her, were gone; there was a great anguish in her eyes, but she moved with her old free, proud grace, she bore herself with the courage of one whose resolve is taken and whose peace is made.

'I am the woman for whom he fought,' she said to the nuns. 'My place is with you.'

Then she went to the side of his bed and kneeled there.

'It is I,' she said in a low voice.

From the misty darkness of pain and delirium his senses struggled into life; his eyes unclosed and rested on her face, and had such glory in them as shone in the eyes of martyrs who saw the saints descend to them.

He could not speak, he could only gaze at her.

She bent her proud head lower and lower and touched his hand with hers.

'You have lost all for me. If it comfort you—I am here!'

CHAPTER XXXI.

In the heart of the Alps of the Valais there lies a little lake, nameless to the world but beautiful; green meadows and woods of pine and beech encircle it, and above it rise the snow mountains, the glory nearest heaven that earth knows.

A road winds down between the hills to Sion but it is seldom traversed; the air is pure and clear as crystal, strong as wine; brooks and torrents tumble through a wilderness of ferns, the cattle-maiden sings on the high grass slopes, the fresh-water fisherman answers the song from his boat on the lake, deep down below and darkly green as emeralds are.

The singer, who is mute to the world for ever, listens to the song without pain, for he is happy.

His home is here, above the shadowy water, facing the grand amphitheatre of ice and snow, that at daybreak and at sunset flash like the rose, glow like the fires of a high altar. It is an old house built to resist all storms, yet open for the sun and summer. Simple, yet noble, with treasures of art and graces of colour, and the gifts of kings, and emperors, and cities, given in those years that are gone for ever to Corrèze. The waters wash its walls, the pine-woods shelter it from the winds, its terraces face the Alps.

Here, when the world is remembered, it seems but a confused and foolish dream, a fretting fever, a madness of disordered minds and carking discontent. What is the world beside Nature, and a love that scarcely even fears death since it believes itself to be immortal?

He leans over the stone balustrade of his terrace and watches the rose-leaves, shaken off by the wind, drop down into the green water

far below, and float there like pink shells. On a marble table by him there lie some pages of written music, the score of an opera, with which he hopes to achieve a second fame in the kingdom of music which knows him no more. A great genius can never altogether rest without creation, and he is yet young enough to win the ivy-crown twice over in his life.

In the sunset light a woman, with a dog beside her, comes out on to the terrace. She is clothed in white, her face has regained its early loveliness, her eyes have a serious sweet luminance; on her life there will be always the sadness of a noble nature that has borne the burden of others' sins, of a grand temper that has known the bitterness of calumny, and has given back an unjust scorn with a scorn just and severe; those shadows all the tenderness, the reverence, the religious homage of a man's surpassing love can never wholly banish from her.

As with him, amidst his happiness, there will sometimes arise a wistful longing, not for the homage of the world, not for his old hours of

triumph, not for the sight of multitudes waiting on the opening of his lips, but for that magical power for ever perished, that empire for ever lost over all the melody of earth, that joy and strength of utterance, which are now for ever as dead in him as the song is dead in the throat of the shot bird, so upon her, for no fault of her own, the weight of a guilt not her own lies heavily, and the ineffaceable past is like a ghost that tracks her steps; from her memory the pollution of her marriage never can pass away, and to her purity her life is for ever defiled by those dead years, which are like mill-stones hung about her neck.

She was innocent always, and yet——. When the moths have gnawed the ermine, no power in heaven or earth can make it ever again altogether what once it was.

'You never regret?' Vere says to him, as they stand together, and see the evening colours of glory shine on the snow summits.

'I? Regret that I lost the gas-glare to live in heaven's light! Can you ask such a thing?'

'Yet you lost so much, and——'

'I have forgotten what I lost. Nay, I lost nothing. I passed away off the world's ear while I was yet great, how well that is—to be spared all the discontent of decadence, all the pain of diminished triumphs, all the restless sting of new rivalries, all the feebleness of a fame that has outlived itself—how well that is!'

She smiles; that grave and tender smile which is rather from the eyes than on the mouth.

'You say that because you are always generous. Yet when I think of all I cost you, I wonder that you love me so well.'

'You wonder! That is because you cannot see yourself; humility blinds you, as vanity blinds other women.'

'They called me too proud——'

'Because you were not as they were; what could they understand of such a soul as yours?'

'You understand me and God sees me—that is enough.'

He takes her hands in his, and his kiss on

them has as reverent and knightly a grace as that with which he had bent to her feet in the day of Szarisla.

What is the world to them? what is the bray and the tinsel of a mountebank's show to those who watch the stars and dwell in the gracious silence of the everlasting hills?

* * * * *

In the bright evening light of the spring-time at the same hour the crowds go down the Boulevards of Paris. The black horses of Prince Zouroff go with them; he is sitting behind them alone. His face is gloomy, his eyes are sullen. On the morrow he marries his old friend Jeanne, Duchesse de Sonnaz.

Russia, which permits no wife to plead against her husband, set him free and annulled his marriage on the testimony of servants, who, willing to please, and indifferent to a lie the more, or a lie the less, bore the false witness that they thought would be agreeable to their lord.

Too late he repents; too late he regrets; too late, he thinks, as alas! we all think:

'Could I have my life back, I would do otherwise!'

In her own carriage, down the Avenue du Bois, drives the Duchesse de Sonnaz, with her children in front of her; her face is sparkling, her eyes are full of malice and entertainment; the Faubourg finds her approaching marriage with her lost Paul's old friend, one natural and fitting. With a satisfied soul she says to herself, as the setting sun gilds Paris:

'*Avec un peu d'esprit, on arrive à tout.*'

For marriage she does not care, but she loves a triumph, she enjoys a vengeance—she has both.

'*Je ferai danser mon ours,*' she reflects, as the eyes of her mind glance over her future.

The Princess Nelaguine drives also in her turn out of the avenue and down the Champs Elysées; with her is her old comrade, Count Schondorff, who says to her:

'And you alone know your brother's divorced wife! Oh, surely Nadine——'

'I know the wife of Corrèze; I know a very noble woman who was the victim of my

own brother and of Jeanne,' answers the little Russian lady with asperity and resolve. 'My dear Fritz, she had no sin against my brother, no fault in her anywhere, I have told the Emperor the same thing, and I am not a coward, though I shall salute Jeanne on both cheeks to-morrow because life is a long hypocrisy. Yes, I know Vera. I shall always love her; and honour her too. So does the Duchess of Mull. She was the martyr of a false civilisation, of a society as corrupt as that of the Borgias, and far more dishonest. She had chastity, and she had also courage. We, who are all poltroons, and most of us adulteresses, when we find a woman like that gibbet her, *pour encourager les autres.*'

At the same hour Lady Dolly, too, rolls home from Hyde Park, and ascends to her little fan-lined boudoir, and cries a little, prettily, with her old friend Adine, because she has just learned that Jura, poor dear Jura, has been killed in the gun-room at Camelot by the explosion of a rifle he had taken down as unloaded.

'Everything is so dreadful,' she says with a little sob and shiver. 'Only to think that I cannot know my own daughter! And then to have to wear one's hair flat, and the bonnets are not becoming, say what they like, and the season is so stupid; and now poor dear Jack has killed himself, really killed himself, because nobody believes about that rifle being an accident, he has been so morose and so strange for years, and his mother comes and reproaches *me* when it is all centuries ago, centuries! and I am sure I never did him anything but good!'

Other ladies come in, all great ladies, and some men, all young men, and they have tea out of little yellow cups, and sip iced syrups, and sit and talk of the death at Camelot as they chatter between the four walls with the celebrated fans hung all over them, amidst them the fan of Maria Teresa once sent to Félicité.

'She has so much to bear, and she is such a dear little woman!' say all the friends of Lady Dolly. 'And it is very dreadful for her not to be able to know her own daughter. She always behaves beautifully about it, she is

so kind, so sweet! But how can she know her, you know?—divorced, and living out of the world with Corrèze!'

So the moths eat the ermine; and the world kisses the leper on both cheeks.

THE END.

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